United Nations S/PV.5411

Security Council

Sixty-first year

Provisional

5411th meeting

Monday, 17 April 2006, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Wang Guangya	(China)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Mayoral
	Congo	Mr. Ikouebe
	Denmark	Ms. Løj
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Nana Effah-Apenteng
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson
	United Republic of Tanzania	Mr. Manongi
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, incuding the Palestinian question

Letter dated 10 April 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/227)

Letter dated 11 April 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yemen to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/239)

Letter dated 12 April 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/240)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A.

06-31145 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

Letter dated 10 April 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/227)

Letter dated 11 April 2006 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Yemen to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/239)

Letter dated 12 April 2006 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2006/240)

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Algeria, Austria, Bahrain, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey, Venezuela and Yemen, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Gillerman (Israel) took a seat at the Council table.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the other aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 17 April 2006 from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, which will be issued as document S/2006/241 and which reads as follows:

> "I have the honour to request that, in accordance with its previous practice, the Security Council invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting of the Security Council being held on Monday, 17 April 2006, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question."

I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite the Permanent Observer of Palestine to participate in the meeting in accordance with the rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Mansour (Palestine) took a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 17 April 2006 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which reads as follows:

> "In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to request that I be invited to participate in the debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, under rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council."

In accordance with past practice in this matter, I propose that the Council extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Paul Badji to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter dated 17 April 2006 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of Qatar to the United Nations, which reads as follows:

> "Pursuant to rule 39 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, I have the honour to request the participation of Yahya A.

Mahmassani, Ambassador and Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, in the open meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, scheduled for this afternoon, 17 April 2006."

That letter will be published as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/2006/244.

Unless I hear any objection, I shall take it that the Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Yahya Mahmassani.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Mahmassani to take the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in response to requests contained in letters from Bahrain, document S/2006/227; from Yemen, document S/2006/239; and from Malaysia, document S/2006/240.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): At the outset, I wish to express our warm congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. We are confident that, under your able stewardship, the work of the Council will be brought to a successful conclusion. We would also like to thank your predecessor, Ambassador César Mayoral, for the excellent manner in which he led the work of the Council for the month of March.

Before I begin my statement, I would like to recall that today the Palestinian people commemorated Palestinian Prisoners' Day, in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails and detention centres. Over 9,500 Palestinians are currently being held as political prisoners by Israel, the occupying Power, including around 350 Palestinian children and 120 Palestinian women. Those prisoners face forms of torture and mistreatment during their arrest and detention, and are consistently denied visits by their families and lawyers. Demonstrations are being held throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, demanding the release of those prisoners. In that regard, we would like to express our grave concern regarding the harsh treatment and deplorable living conditions of the Palestinian prisoners and detainees, and call upon the occupying Power to release them in accordance with the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law.

The Security Council has a clear responsibility vis-à-vis the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hence, irrespective of developments on the ground — be they positive or negative- the Security Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, for defending the Charter and international law, and for defending and ensuring compliance with its own relevant resolutions.

In that connection, the convening of this open debate of the Council, given the deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is relevant and important. We would like to express our appreciation to the members of the Arab Group, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference for their submitted requests to convene this meeting, as well as to thank them for their constant and unwavering support for the rights of the Palestinian people, especially those living under Israeli occupation. We would also like to thank the members of the Security Council for demonstrating their flexibility and understanding during last week's negotiations on a draft presidential statement on the latest violence in the region. We would especially like to thank our brothers from Qatar for the role they played in that regard. It is unfortunate, however, that the Security Council failed to shoulder its responsibility and to respond appropriately to this latest dangerous situation.

Over the past week and throughout the period since I last addressed the Security Council on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued and intensified its military campaign against the Palestinian people. Flagrant and grave violations of international law are being committed by the occupying Power against the Palestinian civilian population every single day, every hour, and even at this very moment. In grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which governs military

occupation, and in serious violation of other relevant provisions of international law, Israel continues to use excessive and indiscriminate force against Palestinian civilians, killing men, women and children, and causing vast destruction to Palestinian homes and property.

The latest aggression and escalation of military attacks by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, and especially in the Gaza Strip, began on Friday, 7 April 2006. Over the span of just three days, the occupying Power killed at least 21 Palestinians, among them two children. The occupying Power carried out that latest crime against the Palestinian people using military war planes, F-16s, helicopter gunships, tanks and other heavy weaponry.

Beyond human devastation, those attacks, mostly extrajudicial executions, also wounded scores of innocent Palestinian bystanders, including children. It has become common practice for the occupying Power to carry out its open and declared illegal policy of extrajudicial executions in densely populated civilian areas, knowing full well that civilians will be endangered. In fact, after the killing of a nine-year-old Palestinian girl, Hadeel Ghebin, and wounding her seven siblings and her pregnant mother on 10 April 2006, the Israeli Foreign Minister, as well as other Israeli ministers and military generals, confirmed that the Israeli Government would not ease its military activities but would, rather, intensify them, including the possibility of reinvading the Gaza Strip.

Those attacks came on the heels of an additional Israeli attack that took place in the Gaza Strip on 5 April 2006. During that attack, Israeli occupying forces fired missiles into the compound of the President of the Palestinian Authority and the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas. The missiles landed on the President's helicopter landing pad, about 100 meters from his office, leaving deep craters on the ground. At that time, President Abbas stated that the Israeli escalation was not justified and that the occupying Power's real intent was only to

> "sabotage the daily lives of the Palestinian people and to fully destroy the institutions of the Palestinian National Authority and its security apparatus, after partially destroying them throughout the past five years".

He went on to state that it was all aimed at "destruction for the sake of destruction". The strikes also targeted three other sites in densely populated civilian areas in the Gaza Strip, killing one Palestinian and wounding 10 others, including a mother and her six-month-old baby. Furthermore, the Israeli newspaper Ma'ariv reported that, on 14 April, Israeli occupying forces bombarded the northern Gaza Strip with over 300 shells.

The Government of Israel has continuously tried to portray its latest military escalation simply as a response to violence emanating from the occupied Palestinian territory. However, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, what the Israeli Government is doing and what it has done throughout its nearly 39-year military occupation is clearly intended to serve its clear political objectives of inflicting maximum pain, suffering and loss on the Palestinian people while it entrenches its occupation and continues with its theft and colonization of Palestinian land, especially through its illegal settlement campaign and the construction of its expansionist wall.

Nevertheless, I would like to reiterate that President Mahmoud Abbas continues to condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including suicide bombings. After today's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, President Abbas strongly condemned it and stated that such acts are against the Palestinian national consensus and harm the high national interests of the Palestinian people. In that regard, we restate our condemnation of the loss of innocent civilian life on both sides, Palestinian and Israeli, and we continue to call upon the occupying Power to do the same.

As I stated at the beginning of my intervention, Israel, the occupying Power, has been relentless in its grave breaches of international law, including the willful killing and injury of civilians and the practice of extrajudicial executions. The occupying Power has continued and is thus committing those crimes against the Palestinian people with complete impunity and on a repeated basis. That must be condemned by the international community and measures should be taken to halt the latest escalation by the occupying Power of its military attacks, as well as all of its illegal practices and policies against the Palestinian civilian population.

Moreover, the international community needs to show more resolve in dealing with the situation, whether on the ground or concerning the political

aspect. Double standards concerning the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory cannot be accepted. This double standard can be seen as the international community remains silent and sits idly by while the occupying Power is indirectly permitted to kill Palestinian civilians and continue its illegal policies while the Palestinian people are being killed and collectively punished through political and economic isolation for democratically electing their Government. In this regard, any calls on the Palestinian side will only be viewed as hypocritical if they are not matched by equal pressure on the occupying Power to put an end to its harsh military measures, to end its subjugation of the Palestinian people and accept their right to live in freedom and security under the protection of international law.

The international community through the Security Council must act firmly to stop the latest aggression and escalation of military attacks by the occupying Power against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and ensure that the occupying Power complies with its obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. We continue to hope that the Security Council will take the necessary measures to stop this dangerous deterioration and shoulder its responsibilities in this regard.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Allow me to express to you, Sir, our warmest congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April and to commend your predecessor, Ambassador Mayoral, for his able conduct of this Council last month.

Before I start I would like to mention that I listened very carefully to the statement by the Palestinian observer, who, among other things, was speaking about double standards. Talking of double standards, there were many words mentioned by the Palestinian observer. However, strangely or curiously, there was one word missing: Hamas. Let me spell it out for you: H — A — M — A — S, Hamas. No mention. And I think that the members of this Council deserve to know and to hear from the Palestinian observer who indeed he represents. President Mahmoud Abbas, whom he quoted as condemning the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv? Or Hamas, which justified and celebrated the suicide bombing in Tel Aviv? I think we all deserve to know that.

Two weeks ago, on March 30, we met in this same forum to discuss the situation in the Middle East. During that meeting, we stated our belief that the next terror attack against Israeli civilians was being financed, planned and nearing execution at that very moment. Not even one hour after the meeting, a Palestinian terrorist murdered four Israelis in yet another atrocious attack. Since then and until today, we have witnessed daily rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

In my original speech, Mr. President, I wanted to share with you — unfortunately yet again — our sad belief that the next terror attack was very near; the targeting of even more innocent human life was on its way. However, the tragic reality was even quicker than I envisioned in my worst nightmares.

This morning, in Tel Aviv, in the midst of the holy week of Passover, a Palestinian suicide bomber murdered nine people and wounded over 60 others in yet another horrific act of terrorism. The Palestinian terrorist organizations, Islamic Jihad and the Fatah-linked Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades immediately claimed responsibility for this horrendous attack. How did the newly elected officials of the Palestinian Authority respond to this morning's abominable act? Sami Abu Zuhri, the official spokesperson for Hamas, did not bother to condemn the attack. Instead, he claimed the Palestinians "have every right to use all means to defend themselves" and said the attack was justified. This reaction should not come as a surprise, because only two weeks ago that same individual stated that the Hamas movement is committed to all forms of resistance, including suicide bombings.

Today's horrific act of terrorism, as well as those that preceded it, are the direct result of the new axis of terror that I have previously described, an axis comprised of Member States in this Organization, namely Iran and Syria, and of terrorist organizations that they have been harbouring, nurturing, financing and supporting, namely Hamas and Hizbollah.

This act of terrorism did not happen in a vacuum. It is the swift implementation of the extreme, mad and dangerous statements voiced only last week by Palestinian officials and their sponsors. The words we have heard are just a sample of the ongoing litany of hatred, incitement and venom.

Allow me to present at random a very few recent statements from high-ranking Palestinian officials. Last

Saturday in Teheran, during a well-attended macabre convention of terror, Khaled Mashal — the Hamas leader who usually sits comfortably at his headquarters in Damascus, another capital of this axis of terror — said, "The new Government in Palestine will never recognize Israel, and there is no other way than resistance to drive out the enemy from our lands." Ismail Haniya — the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and the newest addition to this axis of terror — stated after his bid for leadership, "Hamas's Government ministers are all potential Shahids". On Saturday, the ultimate leader of this axis of terror, the President of Iran — who has been calling for the annihilation of Israel, acquiring nuclear capabilities to do so and denying the Holocaust while preparing for the next one — continued his calls to wipe Israel off the map and stated, "The Zionist regime is on the road to being eliminated". He referred to Israel as "a rotten, dried tree that would collapse in one storm". It is particularly troubling that this same regime announced just last week that it has enriched uranium, indicating a likely intention to perpetrate that very storm.

Those words speak for the themselves and do not need any interpretation. They are clear and represent the stated goal of this axis of terror which to our extreme horror was again executed, literally, this morning in Tel Aviv. The mutilated bodies and the blood in the marketplace are the most poignant evidence.

Each day, extreme fundamentalist leaders are inciting more acts of terrorism. A dark cloud is looming over our region, and it is metastasizing as a result of the statements and actions by the leaders of Iran, Syria and the newly elected Government of the Palestinian Authority. These recent statements are clear declarations of war. I urge each and every one of you to listen carefully and to take them at face value.

In the light — or rather, in the darkness — of these words coming from the corridors of this new axis of evil and terror and echoed constantly by deeds on the ground — deeds of murder and terror, homicide bombings and brutal killings, with more than 80 daily alerts of terrorism in Israel, of which 16 are direct, specific threats — we urge the international community and the Security Council to take swift action to try and prevent the next murder, which is, unfortunately, already on its way.

Without the capable and sophisticated efforts of the Israeli security forces and the effectiveness of the security fence, we would witness every single day a scene of horrific death, bloody streets, limbless children and widespread fear. Since January, 11 major suicide terrorist attacks have been prevented and 90 potential suicide bombers have been arrested. These attacks would have taken place in crowded areas in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, causing mass fatalities. Fortunately, security forces prevented or pre-empted the worst of these. Yet the number of terror attacks during the current period continues to mount. Since September 2000, Palestinian terrorists have perpetrated nearly 26,000 terror attacks against the Israeli people.

One of the most serious threats to security in Israel has been the persistent fire of Qassam rockets and mortar shells. Since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, Palestinian terrorists have fired more than 500 Qassam rockets and mortar shells, representing the primary form of terrorism against Israel, emanating from the Gaza Strip, which Israel has just disengaged from. On the very day of our national parliamentary elections, for the first time a Palestinian terrorist organization fired a Katyusha rocket into Israel.

Members of the Security Council, imagine what life would be like if, every day, rockets showered the skies of your communities. You do not know if your home will be struck. You do not know if your child's school will be hit. You are under attack day and night. I would like to ask each representative in the Council: what would you do if your country were besieged by rockets and mortar fire from territory from which you had just disengaged? Would you wait passively for more rocket attacks to continue? Would you sit idly as acts of terrorism against your citizens continued? Would you — as, unfortunately, a member of both the Security Council and the Quartet has already done — finance this engine of terror?

Israel will not compromise the safety and security of its citizens. We will not passively allow human bombs, Katyushas or Qassams to penetrate our territory, kill Israeli citizens and put our people at risk. Let me make it very clear: Israel regrets any loss of life, but any attempt to equate the loss of life caused erroneously by Israel acting in self-defence with a suicide bomber specifically targeting women and children is morally wrong and false. Terror is terror is terror and can never and must never be justified.

In view of all of that, I ask each and every member of the Council: indeed, what would you do? Would you just sit still and wait to bury your children? Would you ignore this harsh reality and just act as if it were business as usual? Or would you try and stop this horror and eliminate this danger — a danger, I must add, not just to Israel but to the whole free world and to civilization as we know it, as this axis of evil and terror sows the seeds of the first world war of the twenty-first century.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the text in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

Mr. Bolton (United States of America): We meet in the aftermath of a vicious and despicable act of terrorism in Tel Aviv. We should first express our condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government and the people of Israel, and also express our outrage.

The burden of responsibility for preventing terrorist attacks such as this one rests with the Palestinian Authority. The United States has noted reactions by several terrorist groups, including Hamas, that defend and even applaud the act of terror in Tel Aviv today, as we have noted President Abbas's quick denunciation of it. Defence or sponsorship of terrorist acts by officials of the Palestinian Cabinet will have the gravest effect on relations between the Palestinian Authority and all States seeking peace in the Middle East.

The Quartet noted in its 30 March statement its grave concern that the new Palestinian Government has not committed to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and respect for previous agreements and obligations between the parties, including the road map.

The Palestinian Authority must be held responsible for enforcing law and order and taking immediate action to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism. We meet in the aftermath of a terrorist attack in Tel Aviv that the Palestinian Government has, despicably enough, actually supported. Not only is there no action to prevent the launching of Qassam rockets into Israel or to prevent terrorist attacks such as that launched today, but such murderous and barbarous attacks are actually defended.

We regret the loss of innocent life, including in Gaza. The United Nations must play an even-handed role in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, encouraging both parties to take the necessary steps to make progress along the road map. The United Nations cannot be seen to favour one side over the other. But the United Nations has repeatedly denounced terrorism and should do so again now.

Unbalanced resolutions or statements undermine the credibility of the United Nations and its ability to be an honest broker. In last week's consultations aimed at adopting a presidential statement, the United States was willing to support a balanced statement calling on both sides to refrain from taking any steps that could escalate the situation. Unfortunately, we were unable to achieve a balanced statement that acknowledged the critical roles that both sides must play in fostering the environment needed for progress along the road map.

Israel has a right to defend itself. To condemn Israel for defending itself while failing to acknowledge either the provocation of persistent Qassam rocket attacks or the Palestinian Authority's responsibility for taking action to stop the Qassam attacks is unworthy of the Security Council.

In light of today's terrorist attack in Tel Aviv, it is especially important to stress the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to take action to stop terrorism. The Security Council cannot remain silent when Hamas, the ruling party in the Palestinian Authority, is supporting such attacks.

We also remain concerned about the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. The United States has long been a supporter of the Palestinian people through substantial contributions of our foreign assistance funds. On 7 April, the United States announced that it would increase humanitarian aid to help Palestinians in need. Basic human assistance — including health, food and education — will increase by 57 percent, to a total of $245 million. The United States will also provide $42 million to strengthen civil society and independent institutions. Assistance will be administered through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other non-Palestinian Authority actors, including local and international non-governmental organizations.

The United States remains firmly committed to the road map and to the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. But to see progress along the road map, there must be two partners. A Palestinian Authority Government which refuses to accept its responsibility to prevent acts of terror and punish the perpetrators of such violence, and which by its unwillingness to condemn such attacks gives at least tacit approval and encouragement to terrorism, cannot be considered a partner in peace.

In closing, I would note that Security Council meetings such as this one today contribute very little to improving the situation on the ground. These meetings consume considerable time and resources but ultimately produce nothing concrete. In fact, by diverting our attention from the real issues we are not advancing the cause of peace.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): In recent weeks, innocent civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, have continued to suffer revenge and reprisals as a consequence of a new cycle of violence. The parties' mutual accusations concerning the immediate causes of the recent violence are, unfortunately, very familiar. Shamefully, we have become accustomed to being witnesses of violence. Since September 2000, and even before, we have been hearing the same arguments from both sides. For that reason we cannot help asking ourselves how much more suffering innocent Palestinians and innocent Israelis have to endure before some of their leaders abandon the dead-end road of mutual negation and set off irrevocably on the journey towards peace, reconciliation and recognition.

We believe that an essential step towards putting an end to the vicious circle is for the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to recognize each other's legitimate aspirations to security and to live in peace and dignity, and then to take concrete steps to realize them.

Israel's right to live in peace and security requires that the Palestinian Authority take decisive measures against individuals or groups that carry out attacks against Israeli targets. We believe that the new Palestinian Government must take a clear stance against violence and immediately act to halt Qassam rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip and suicide attacks, and to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure on its territory, as it has been called upon to do in the road map.

Argentina strongly condemns the terrorist attack committed a few hours ago in Tel Aviv and conveys its sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Israel. We stress that there can be no justification whatsoever for the killing of innocent civilians. Likewise, the new Palestinian Authority Government must fulfil the three conditions set by the Quartet and by the Security Council, which my country fully supports.

The Palestinian right to live in peace with dignity cannot be achieved unless Israel puts an immediate end to military operations in the occupied territories, to extrajudicial executions and to other practices that contravene international law.

In the same vein, Israel must cease all settlement activity and halt the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian territory. In that regard, we cannot fail to observe that if the prospect of a viable Palestinian State becomes an ever-more distant dream due to constant Israeli unilateral actions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, it will become increasingly difficult to persuade the Palestinians that it is imperative to accept the path of compromise.

We reiterate that peace cannot be imposed unilaterally or by force. On the contrary, it must come about through a just and final solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and can be achieved only through good-faith negotiations between the two parties. For that reason, any territorial modifications to the line of 4 June 1967 must be agreed upon in the framework of those negotiations and not be the outcome of faits accomplis on the ground.

The Palestinian right to live in peace and with dignity also relates to the restrictions on freedom of movement and access. The isolation of the Gaza Strip has undoubtedly contributed to the increased suffering of the population of that territory and to the further deterioration of the already dire humanitarian situation. We reiterate our call to Israel to take measures to keep the Karni crossing permanently open. Both parties should attach priority to the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005, and to its urgent implementation.

In essence, that is the message we would like to convey to the Israelis and the Palestinians. We regret

that the Security Council was unable to transmit a similar message last week and that the negotiations on a draft presidential statement failed. In my country's view, the final version of the draft text was balanced and would have constituted a sound basis for a timely reaction to the current events in the region.

To conclude, I would like to underline that despite the persistent differences between the parties, we all share a common interest and duty to prevent a security and humanitarian crisis in the Middle East, in particular in the occupied Palestinian territories. We remain convinced that the best way to avoid such a crisis is through good-faith negotiations leading to the establishment of a sovereign, democratic and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like first to thank you, Ms. President, for convening this meeting, which is providing additional information to Council members about events in an important part of the world. Qatar is convinced of the need to settle disputes through peaceful means, in particular through negotiations based on international resolutions and peace initiatives such as the road map and the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut summit.

The violence and repressive practices carried out by the Israeli army of occupation are in flagrant contravention of international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy. Those practices target innocent men, women, children and disabled persons; they include extrajudicial assassinations and have led to counter-measures, have increased instability and have prevented any peaceful settlement.

We reaffirm that the elections to the Palestinian parliament were honest and democratic and the outcome was a free expression of the Palestinian people's democratic choice. We stress the fact that the Palestinian people's freely expressed choice must be respected, as must the authorities elected by the Palestinian people.

Secondly, any unilateral settlement that contravenes the reference texts and the bases of the peace process will not provide a comprehensive and lasting peace.

Thirdly, repressive measures and illegal policies such as the building and expansion of settlements, the construction of the barrier and the isolation of Palestinian towns and villages pose further obstacles to peace and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis afflicting the Palestinian people in the occupied territories.

Fourthly, owing to changes in the Government, the Palestinian people are at a crucial juncture with respect to their future, since the Security Council has repeatedly called for the creation of a sovereign, democratic and viable Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel in peace and security.

The Council and the international community, in particular the sponsors of the peace process — that is, the Quartet — should deploy greater efforts to bring about the resumption of the process on the agreed bases, in particular the resolutions of the Security Council, the principle of land for peace and the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut summit, to which Arab leaders referred recently in Khartoum.

The State of Qatar appeals to the parties concerned to shoulder their responsibilities and to return to the negotiating table. We call on the Israeli Government seriously to engage in the peace process and to withdraw to the 4 June 1967 boundary line. The primary reason for the existence of this conflict is Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian land, which stands in the way of a just and lasting peace in the region.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): My delegation wishes fully to associate itself with the statement to be made shortly by the Ambassador of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

France is deeply preoccupied by the recent upsurge in violence in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territories, which has left in its wake numerous civilian victims, in particular children. We wish to convey our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims as well as to the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

France condemns in the most energetic terms the deadly suicide attack committed this morning in Tel Aviv. That attack has once again given rise to feelings of horror and of condemnation. Nothing could possibly justify such a hateful act, and we are shocked by comments made by the Hamas spokesman in that connection. We condemn also the launching of homemade rockets from the Gaza Strip into Israel. We welcome the clear-cut position taken by President Mahmoud Abbas against violence, and we call on the

Palestinian Government to publicly denounce terrorism and to take immediate measures to prevent such attacks.

My country has on several occasions expressed its concern at the increasing violence in the Gaza Strip. The use of force by Israel, in particular indiscriminate artillery fire against the Gaza Strip, poses a threat to the civilian population. While recognizing Israel's right to defend itself against terrorist acts, we call on the Israeli Government to show the greatest restraint and to cease such practices contravening international law, in particular extrajudicial assassinations.

France appeals for calm and restraint. We call on the parties to respect the arrangements agreed last year at the Sharm el-Sheik summit. Recent incidents also demonstrate the importance of keeping open channels for discussion between Israel and Palestine. In that connection, we deplore the Israeli decision to close the Jericho liaison office and encourage the parties to continue to engage in dialogue.

My country wishes to express its concern at the grave deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, in particular in the Gaza Strip. Israel must discharge its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and honour its commitments under past agreements. We call for respect for, and the prompt implementation of, all the provisions of the Agreement on Movement and Access, signed in November last. The full reopening of the Karni crossing is crucial in that respect. We call on the Israeli Government also fully to reimburse to the Palestinian Authority all tax income collected on its behalf, in keeping with the Paris Protocol.

As I have noted recently in this forum, France and Europe as a whole do not wish to punish the Palestinian people or sacrifice the institutional achievements that have been made over the past decade. With respect to the recent decisions taken by the European Union, my delegation would like to emphasize that European assistance to the Palestinian Authority is suspended only partly and temporarily. The European Union remains the main donor to the Palestinian Authority. France deems it important that assistance earmarked for the Palestinian people be maintained. Thus humanitarian assistance, broadly speaking, will continue, as will most of our cooperation projects, in particular in vital areas such as health care.

Direct budgetary assistance has, however, been temporarily suspended until alternative channels can be defined, to ensure that such assistance can be clearly targeted to priority needs such as education and health care. The Council of Ministers of the European Union plans to periodically review this issue so as to assess the Palestinian Government's attitude towards the three principles set out by the European Union, the Quartet and the Security Council, that is, the renunciation of violence, the recognition of Israel's right to exist, and the recognition of previous agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The purpose of that policy is not to punish the Palestinian people, but instead to encourage the new Palestinian Government to adopt the principles of the peace process that have been endorsed since the Madrid Conference by the international community and the PLO.

France believes that the recent escalation of violence calls for a strong political response on the part of the international community. In that connection, we regret that the Security Council last week was not able to agree on the balanced draft presidential statement submitted by Qatar, which my delegation supported.

In this fragile context, we deem necessary a robust initiative on the part of the Quartet that would bring the parties back to the negotiating table. We welcome the stance taken by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in favour of a resumption of the peace talks. We must take them at their word. France once again solemnly appeals to the two parties to refrain from any unilateral action or undertaking that could prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations or threaten the viability of a two-State solution.

In that regard we remain very concerned at the continuation of the Israeli settlement policy in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, at the route of the separation barrier, which contravenes the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and General Assembly resolution ES-10/15, and at the obstacles to access to the Jordan Valley for resident or riparian Palestinian populations.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the deep attachment of France to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the land for peace initiative, the Arab

Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut Summit and Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is a cause for great concern. There have been recent incidents of Palestinian extremists firing rockets into the territory of Israel from the Gaza Strip and response attacks by the Israel Defense Forces. Innocent people have become the victim of those incidents, all of which have led to an increase in tensions and to a deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

This meeting of the Security Council is taking place against the backdrop of today's tragic events at the central bus station in Tel Aviv, scene of a terrorist act for which Islamic Jihad has claimed responsibility. Russia firmly and categorically condemns the recent bloody attacks in Tel Aviv carried out by extremists. They have again struck innocent people; there can be no justification for that. We express our condolences to the bereaved families and offer our sympathies to those who have suffered as a result of the attack.

We note that President Abbas of the Palestinian National Authority condemned that terrorist act. The intentions of those who perpetrated it are clear: to worsen the already challenging situation in Palestinian-Israeli relations as much as they can and to again unleash a cycle of violence and lay to rest any hope for a long-term settlement leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State enjoying good-neighbourly relations with Israel. Under such conditions, it is important that we prevent a deterioration of the situation, which might lead to direct confrontation. We need to send a clear signal to both sides that they must refrain from policies leading to the use of force to bring about a settlement, and must work out a dialogue based on the road map.

At this critical juncture we call upon the Palestinian Authority to do its utmost to prevent anti-Israeli acts, above all terrorist attacks, and to do everything in its power to ensure that the situation is properly monitored in the areas under its control. The international community expects the Palestinians to reaffirm that they will implement of all of the obligations that they have undertaken under bilateral agreements and agreements with Israel, as well as their commitments to the principles set forth in the 30 January statement of the Quartet of international mediators. Those principles provide for the abandonment of violence as a means of achieving political aims, the recognition of Israel's right to exist and respect for and compliance with previous commitments and arrangements — particularly the road map, the implementation of which would be the most reliable way to bring about a just, negotiated settlement of the issue.

We also call upon the Government of Israel to demonstrate restraint, despite the difficult circumstances, and to prevent a collapse into direct confrontation. Israel must also prevent unilateral acts that prejudice final status agreements, particularly with respect to its settlement activities and the building of the separation wall. It must also refrain from its practice of extrajudicial killings.

We are certain that only joint efforts can prevent all terrorist attacks, end the cycle of violence and renew the political process, on the basis of the road map. In particular, we firmly believe that the resumption of contact between the parties as soon as possible, based on the road map, will bring about a settlement of the current crisis. The Russian Federation will continue to robustly support efforts to that end, including within the framework of the Quartet.

Given the worsening humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories, the provision of international assistance to the Palestinian National Authority must be continued, free from political preferences. The international community should do everything it can to ensure that assistance to the Palestinians continues with a view to addressing their pressing social and humanitarian needs. As representatives of the Russian Federation have stated on a number of occasions, ending such assistance could have a serious impact and would only cause the situation to deteriorate and lead to a new outbreak of violence and confrontation, worsening an already difficult humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories.

We believe that the Quartet and the entire international community must prevent events from developing in that direction. The Russian Federation is making a contribution to the Palestinians and will, in the near future, provide $10 million as urgent assistance to the Palestinian National Authority for humanitarian needs. We anticipate that those measures will contribute to preventing a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories.

Mr. Oshima (Japan): In the weeks following the elections in Palestine and Israel, the prospect of peace

and the peace process in the Middle East have been facing complex challenges, which require delicate handling and the utmost restraint on both sides if a further dangerous deterioration of the situation is to be avoided.

Japan expresses its grave concern about the continued violence that has been taking place since the week before last, including rocket attacks launched against Israel from Gaza and the escalation of Israeli military operations, especially the shelling of Gaza, both of which resulted in casualties among innocent civilians. We strongly condemn the suicide bombing that occurred in Tel Aviv earlier today, causing even more deaths and casualties. We would like to express our deepest condolences to the victims and the bereaved families, who are suffering as a result of the recurrence of violence on both sides.

We cannot but remain deeply concerned that this resurgence of attacks and counter-attacks may seriously impair future efforts for dialogue and cooperation towards peace. We therefore call on both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, to exercise the utmost self-restraint to prevent the further escalation of violence and restore calm.

Japan strongly expects that the new Palestinian Government, led by Hamas, will adopt a policy that will advance the peace process in accordance with existing agreements and obligations, including the road map. At this very delicate time, political wisdom and courage, as well as restraint, are required more than ever for the advancement of the peace process in the Middle East. We place high hopes in the new Palestinian Government, which has been elected through the democratic process, trusting that it will exercise commensurate governing responsibility in full cooperation with President Abbas, and that it will unequivocally repudiate violence and follow a path of peace, peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity with Israel.

At the same time, the international community should continue to send a strong, positive message to the new Government of the Palestinian Authority, in order to encourage it to initiate the necessary moves to restart the peace process. We must also encourage Israel to make greater efforts to realize peace through dialogue with the Palestinian side. Japan hopes that both sides will take steps to bring about direct talks between President Abbas and interim Prime Minister Olmert as early as possible, as an essential part of their common effort to move towards peace.

With regard to the question of Palestinian assistance, Japan, as one of the major donors to Palestine, will carefully monitor the policy development of the new Palestinian Government on the key issues of concern to us. In the meantime, we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to avert the deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

One year ago, at the time of President Abbas' visit to Japan, the Japanese Government announced an assistance package of approximately $100 million for the immediate future, in support of the President's peace efforts and for the well-being of the Palestinian people. To date, more than 70 per cent of this pledge has been disbursed, including recent food aid for Palestinians in the amount of approximately $6 million announced in mid-March, to be delivered through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the World Food Programme.

My delegation wishes to reaffirm Japan's commitment to a continued active role in the efforts to promote peace, development and prosperity in the Middle East. We will continue to work with all stakeholders for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace, respecting the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the League of Arab States summit in March 2002 in Beirut.

Nana Effah-Apenteng (Ghana): Mr. President, my delegation would like to thank you for convening this meeting. We appreciate the excellent work you are doing in steering the affairs of this body.

This meeting has become necessary because of the continuation of violence in Israel and in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular the recent rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza and the escalation of Israeli military operations in Gaza. The appalling suicide bombing that occurred in Tel Aviv today, claiming innocent lives, clearly demonstrates the futility of the recourse to violence by both sides in place of a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian question. My delegation deplores the mounting death toll on both sides and takes this opportunity to reiterate

its condemnation of all acts of violence and destruction.

We recognize the urgent need for Palestine and Israel to exercise maximum restraint and to refrain from violence, which means that both sides should not resort to unilateral measures that exacerbate tensions and undermine efforts to achieve peace in the region. The great human suffering resulting directly from this cycle of violence is intolerable, and we think it is now more imperative than ever that the international community, particularly the Quartet, assist in bringing the two sides back to the negotiation table. We would continue to encourage the Quartet to remain actively engaged in the search for peace in the region and to assist Palestine and Israel to pursue the path that would lead them to seek a just and lasting solution to their conflict.

Recently, my delegation had the occasion to state before the Security Council that this organ should be informed by its own decisions on this conflict, which, over the years, have consistently affirmed the rights and interests of both Palestine and Israel. We wish to reiterate that the Palestinians have a right to their own independent State, one that guarantees the freedom of movement of its citizens, with real prospects for sustainable development, while the Israelis equally have the right to their own State within well-defined and secure borders.

While Hamas is being encouraged to rethink its position on Israel and to commit its Government to respect all existing agreements, including maintenance of the ceasefire between Palestine and Israel, we note with concern reports of the stoppage of aid to the Palestinian Authority, which is led by President Mahmoud Abbas. Those who suffer from this cut-off are the Palestinian workers who are denied salaries to take care of their families. We urge that greater care be taken not to cause undue economic hardships to Palestinians, many of whom, through no fault of their own, are already being deprived of some of the basic necessities of life.

The Hamas Administration would also do a great service to itself and the Palestinian people if it would pursue policies that would advance the peace process. In so doing, it would earn the goodwill of all Governments and people eager for peace in the Middle East and would negate the need for economic sanctions that its people have painfully begun to bear.

We wish to conclude by prevailing upon the Governments of Israel and Hamas to endeavour to work towards a just, lasting and comprehensive final solution to the Middle East conflict. The Security Council, as well as the Quartet, should play a supportive role in assisting the two parties to work assiduously towards this goal.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation could not have imagined that, after the last few days of last week, we would be discussing the Middle East and that we could accept such an open discussion in the Security Council. We could not have expected that we would be confronting an act of terrorism, and yet that is the case.

This surely demonstrates that those who are fighting Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories have neither consensus on nor control over how to wage their struggle. Some condemn; some congratulate; and some remain silent. This is a problem when trying to arrive at negotiations; it is the crux of the problem. Therefore my delegation would like to express its most energetic condemnation of the terrorist attack carried out this morning in Tel Aviv. This act, just like any terrorist act, deserves condemnation and is unacceptable, whatever its objectives might be. We convey our condolences to the Israeli Government and the families of the victims.

What is happening right now is that the entire negotiation is in jeopardy — peace in the Middle East and the road map set by the Quartet. It is important that both sides take measures to avoid any escalation of the conflict. The new Administration of the Palestinian Authority — Hamas — must take urgent measures to prevent suicide terrorist acts, or it will not enjoy the support of the international community. It will not have it. It must also end rocket attacks against Israel. Israel must also refrain from using excessive force, especially artillery, against Gaza.

Peru supports the conditions that the Quartet presented on 30 January to the newly elected Administration of the Palestinian Authority, headed by Hamas. It was told it had to renounce terrorism and violence, to recognize Israel and to shoulder the commitments accepted by the Palestinians. That is what democracy is — to accept the commitments that one's people accepted, including the road map accepted by the Palestinian people. The new Administration of the Palestinian Authority so far has not responded to

these vital requirements of the Quartet, which, furthermore, were reflected in a presidential statement of the Security Council.

This situation of uncertainty is what prevents negotiations between the parties, since the State of Israel is not recognized and thus there is no Palestinian counterpart for direct negotiations. This is clear; negotiations are requested by the Quartet and the road map. As a result, the possibility of a peaceful and negotiated solution is blocked — a solution that would achieve the coexistence of the two States, Israel and Palestine, living in peace, side by side, within secure and internationally recognized borders.

That lack of recognition, failure to renounce violence and unwillingness to assume the commitments undertaken by the Palestinian people constitute the main obstacle we face now. There is no use going around the matter: that is the problem. For there to be agreement between the parties, we must forestall any chance for unilateral acts of violence.

We believe that the new Palestinian Authority Government was without doubt elected democratically by the Palestinian people, who gave it a clear mandate to improve their living conditions, which were bad, as well as to put an end to the occupation. However, that mandate given to Hamas by the Palestinian people does not mean rejection of the international obligations of the former Palestinian Authority Government. For those reasons, the new Government should not ignore the Quartet — thereby isolating itself from the international community — because, in the final analysis, the same Palestinian people who elected them will ultimately be the ones to pay for that isolation.

The presidential statement we adopted on 3 February 2006 (S/PRST/2006/5) supported the request made by the Quartet in London that the new Palestinian Authority Government renounce violence, recognize Israel and comply with the international obligations assumed by the former Palestinian Administration. That request by the Quartet is now supported also by the main partners that provide assistance to the Palestinian people, many of which are beginning to restrict aid to them because of the lack of a clear response from the new Palestinian Authority Government.

Against that backdrop, my delegation believes that it is nevertheless necessary to continue humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, as well as to consider the best way to channel and optimize that assistance, in particular humanitarian aid, including that provided by the United Nations. This is a question of avoiding abandoning Palestinians living in territory occupied by Israel. We call on the parties to end acts of violence and escalation and somehow muster the good sense to achieve at least some level of communication between the new Palestinian Authority Government and Israel.

Ms. Løj (Denmark): I would like to fully associate Denmark with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

The situation in the Middle East, not least the renewed violence, continues to give rise to serious concern. We strongly condemn this morning's suicide attack in Tel Aviv and convey our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. The attack is an obvious breech of the de facto ceasefire between the parties and thus represents a very serious setback that could spur a new cycle of violence. While we welcome the fact that President Abbas has condemned the attack, we are outraged by the fact that Hamas has called the attack on innocent civilians an act of "self-defence". That seems to confirm that Hamas, contrary to the principles enunciated by the Quartet, still considers armed struggle and terror as means to achieve political aims.

We are also troubled by the recent violent incidents, including the rocket attacks launched against Israel from Gaza and the Israeli countermeasures, which have led to human casualties. We call on all parties to refrain from violence and to exercise self-restraint.

It remains our hope that the new Palestinian Government will in earnest address the Palestinian people's aspirations for peace and Statehood. Regrettably, we note with concern that the Palestinian Government has not yet committed itself to the principles laid out by the Quartet and most recently reiterated by the European Union on 10 April. In accordance with the Quartet's declaration of 30 January,

> "all members of ... [the] Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map"

We thus expect the new Palestinian Government to fulfil the obligations entered into by the Palestinian Authority. We also expect the new Government to commit itself publicly to the rule of law and to reform, as well as to prevent terrorist attacks and dismantle the infrastructure of terror. Violence and terror are incompatible with democratic processes.

Denmark and the rest of the European Union want to preserve the democratic functioning and development of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority. In that context, we underline the central role of President Abbas as the highest representative of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

At the same time, it is clear that under no circumstances can we risk our funds being directed to terrorist or illegitimate purposes. Denmark has suspended direct bilateral assistance to the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the field of institutional support for capacity-building efforts. Specific project activities and support provided through the United Nations, the World Bank and non-governmental organizations will continue.

Following the elections at the end of March, a new Government is expected to be formed in Israel within the next few weeks. I would like to underline the importance we attach to a strong commitment by the new Israeli Government to work towards a negotiated solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on existing agreements, the relevant resolutions and the principles laid down in the road map. Both Israel and the Palestinians should adhere to their obligations and avoid unilateral actions that prejudice final-status issues. Israel must refrain from actions — including settlement activities and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land — that are contrary to international law and that threaten the viability of an agreed two-State solution. Moreover, Israel must take steps to improve the humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinians. The resumption of transfers of Palestinian tax and customs revenues would be one such step. In that context, we welcome Prime Minister Olmert's recently expressed willingness to seek negotiations with the Palestinians, and President Abbas's positive response.

This morning's suicide attack in Israel has yet again demonstrated the need for peace in the Middle East. However, if we let the renewed violence divert us from pursuing the political process towards a negotiated solution, we let the dark forces of terror win. We sincerely hope that both the Palestinians and the new Israeli Government will return to the negotiating table as soon as possible to advance the only durable solution to the Middle East problem: a negotiated two-State solution with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peaceful coexistence.

Mr. Ikouebe (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation associates itself with the statement to be made by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The escalation of violence in the Middle East and its consequences for the lives of the region's population — particularly in Palestine — once again poses a challenge for the international community at a time when we might have hoped for a decline in tension given the situation created by the new, post-electoral political situation both in Palestine and in Israel.

The fresh attack perpetrated this morning in Tel Aviv tragically shows how unacceptable it is that violence should become a daily commonplace in that extremely sensitive region.

My delegation recalls that during a Security Council debate just a few days ago we joined other speakers in calling on the two parties to undertake dialogue and negotiation on the basis of the road map, the Arab peace initiative adopted at Beirut in 2002, the Madrid Conference terms of reference and the principle of land for peace, with a view to the ultimate establishment of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

We regret that the Security Council was unable to reach agreement on the draft presidential statement that had been circulated; we believe it contained all the elements necessary for consensus.

It is clear that the international community's repeated call to transcend political posturing and inflexible ideological positions has gone unheeded yet again. The tragic reality has reasserted itself with its litany of deadly acts, attacks and other reprehensible, unjustifiable and pointless acts of provocation, which often give rise to reprisals and indiscriminate and disproportionate destruction. The two parties have just given the Council a full — and, I might add, provisional — list of these repeated acts of violence.

This renewed tension in the context of a hardening of positions by both parties to the conflict imposes great suffering, particularly on civilians in the occupied territories, who already endure extremely trying living conditions owing to the constraints caused by Israel's refusal to transfer the tax revenues and customs duties owed to the Palestinian Authority and because of the suspension of aid by the principal donors. The current situation gives rise to fear of a major humanitarian crisis in the occupied territories, with the prospect of negative political consequences and the deterioration of the security situation in the region.

In that context, it is important to ensure that the Palestinian people not feel themselves to be harshly punished for having freely made its choice through democratic elections — elections for which we all called.

My delegation considers that peace must be negotiated in good faith among the various actors in the Middle East crisis, with respect for international law, international humanitarian law and all relevant international texts. Once more, we call on the two parties to restore confidence-building measures in order to create the conditions for dialogue, then for negotiation, in compliance with the clearly established and well known rules: recognition of Israel; acceptance of agreements made between Israel and the Palestinian Authority; renunciation of violence on both sides; cessation of unilateral acts and the policy of fait accompli; the dismantlement of settlements; and a halt to the construction of the separation barrier and to targeted killings and acts of collective punishment.

My delegation believes that it is the international community's responsibility to involve itself tenaciously and immediately in finding a settlement of the Middle East crisis. Here, the Quartet, the Security Council and the other actors in the crisis bear particular responsibility. The needed support from the international community, based on the road map, should, in particular, combine firm implementation of the principles of international law with balanced treatment of the two sides.

Mr. Thomson (United Kingdom): I align myself with the statement to be made shortly by the representative of the Austrian presidency of the European Union on behalf of the Union. I should like to make the following additional remarks.

Once again we are discussing events in the Middle East at a critical time. Today's suicide bombing in Tel Aviv is a terrible reminder of the challenges we face. My delegation extends its sympathies to the families and friends of those killed or wounded. The United Kingdom deplores this senseless and totally unjustifiable terrorist attack, which has so far claimed the lives of nine innocent people and which injured many more. We condemn those responsible. We call on the Palestinian Authority to take all necessary steps to bring them to justice and to prevent any further attacks.

We welcome the clear public condemnation of this terrorist act issued by President Abbas this morning and repeated by the Palestinian observer this afternoon. It is very disappointing to us that the new Government has not done likewise and instead has sought to justify this senseless, abhorrent and counterproductive action.

It is our firm view that this attack makes it even more pressing that the new Palestinian Authority Government should renounce violence and act against terrorism, should recognize the State of Israel and should accept previous agreements reached by the Palestinian Authority. That is, it should act to align itself with and implement the principles set out by the Quartet on 30 January 2006 and reiterated on 30 March. With the democratic mandate that they have come responsibilities. It is unacceptable to pursue political goals through violent means.

At the same time, my Government has made clear that the Palestinian people should not be punished for the decisions their new Government takes. We are concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The United Kingdom is doing what it can to ensure that we can continue to provide humanitarian and development support to the Palestinian people to help them build a better future. We have been one of the largest bilateral donors to the Palestinian people, and we hope that we and the rest of the international community can continue to deliver aid. But we need to be sure that our funding is not supporting terrorism.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned at recent violent events in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in particular rocket attacks against Israel and re-entry into the Gaza Strip by the Israel Defense Forces. We are particularly concerned about the impact of Israeli artillery fire close to residential areas. Recent Israel Defence Force operations have resulted in

several Palestinian civilian deaths, including those of children. We believe that such civilian casualties are unacceptable; they, too, leave grieving families and friends.

Israel has a right to defend itself, but any actions in the occupied territories must be proportionate and in accordance with international law. Equally, the Palestinian Authority must take urgent steps to halt all attacks launched against Israel from the Gaza Strip and to reform its security services.

We remain concerned by Israeli policies in Jerusalem, which threaten to cut off Palestinian East Jerusalem from the West Bank. That includes the routing of the barrier on occupied territory, settlement activity both within and around East Jerusalem, and increasingly restricted access to Jerusalem for Palestinians living east of the barrier. Those policies will have serious economic, social and humanitarian consequences for Palestinians and they risk reducing the possibility of reaching a final status agreement on Jerusalem. We call on both parties to implement the Agreement on Movement and Access.

Above all, the United Kingdom remains committed to the principles of a negotiated two-State solution. To achieve that, of course, both parties must meet their obligations under the road map. We welcome Acting Prime Minister Olmert's commitment to negotiations and we urge both sides to resume negotiations as soon as possible.

Mr. Vassilakis (Greece): Greece fully associates itself with the statement to be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

It is with grave concern that we have noted the escalation of violence in Israel and the occupied territories in the past few days. Greece firmly and unconditionally condemns all forms of terrorism, including rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza and senseless suicide bombings, like today's in Tel Aviv. We call upon the Palestinian Authority to take firm action against such unjustifiable acts and their perpetrators.

We recognize the right of Israel to defend itself and protect its citizens. We underline, however, that this right has to be exercised within the boundaries of international law. Greece deplores the disproportionate nature of Israeli military activities, which cost — or, in any case, endanger — the lives of innocent Palestinian civilians, and calls upon Israel to fully respect and comply with the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We call upon both parties to exercise maximum restraint and we expect them to demonstrate political maturity and wisdom and to refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric. As tensions are running high, it is necessary that both parties do their utmost to curb attacks and counterattacks, including extrajudicial killings, so as not to allow a return to the vicious circle of violence that has beset the region for so long.

Greece remains committed to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as on the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

We remain committed to the realization of a two-State solution — Israel and an independent Palestine living side by side within internationally recognized borders in peace and security. In that context, it is important to reiterate that the road map remains the framework of our efforts and that both parties should strive to fulfil their relevant respective obligations and commitments. They should also refrain from taking any and all unilateral actions that threaten to prejudge the outcome of final status negotiations and which undermine efforts to build confidence on the ground.

Over the past couple of months, Israelis and Palestinians alike have had the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights and to elect their representatives. The results of the Palestinian legislative elections, however, gave rise to a number of concerns for the international community. We want to reiterate that it is in the interest of the new Palestinian Government to commit itself to the three principles set out by the Quartet in its statement of 30 January. It must renounce violence and disarm, recognize Israel's right to exist and respect all previous agreements and understandings, including the road map.

Finally, we firmly believe that both peoples have a true desire for peaceful coexistence and that their leaderships will respond to that desire and act accordingly. The international community should stand ready to encourage and assist any steps in that direction.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statement that will be delivered shortly by the Permanent Representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. Therefore, I will limit my statement to the following remarks.

We note with concern the recent violent incidents and hostilities in Israel and the Palestinian territories, including indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza, suicide bombings and major Israeli reprisal operations. They have brought new suffering and the loss of innocent lives to both sides.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our deep sympathy and condolences to the Government of Israel and the families of the victims of the most recent terrorist attack in Tel Aviv. We categorically condemn all terrorist actions, which cannot be justified by any goals or aims. We urge all parties to stop the spiral of violence and we call on them to refrain from taking any steps which might further escalate the hostilities. We urge both sides to exercise the utmost restraint.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Middle East conflict based on all relevant Security Council resolutions and negotiations between the two sides.

Slovakia supports the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In order to achieve progress in implementing the vision of two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, both parties have to accept previous agreements and obligations, return to constructive dialogue and take concrete actions aimed at building and strengthening mutual confidence and trust.

In that context, we note with concern that the new Palestinian Government, which was formed and is led by Hamas, has not committed itself to the three principles laid out by the Quartet in its statement of 30 January. We consider that step to be a basic precondition for the continuation of meaningful talks to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In order to become a partner in the peace process, Hamas and the new Palestinian Government must recognize Israel's right to exist, renounce violence and terror, and accept previous agreements and obligations.

We support the efforts and leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas in that direction. We urge the new Palestinian Government to commit itself to President Abbas' platform of peace, aimed at creating the conditions necessary for the continuation of a dialogue on a solution to the Middle East conflict.

We also join Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his call on the Palestinian Authority to take a clear public stance against violence and to take firm measures against the perpetrators of rocket attacks and suicide bombings. We urge the Palestinian Authority to undertake all necessary measures to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism in the Palestinian territories.

At the same time, we believe that the new Israeli Government will reconfirm its commitment to peace in the Middle East based on the principles laid out in the road map and that it will refrain from undertaking such steps and activities that may be contradictory to the principles of international law. On the other hand, we believe that Israel has the right of self-defence against terrorist attacks. Its responses, however, must be proportionate and everything possible must be done to avoid the loss of innocent lives.

In conclusion, I would like to emphatically stress that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. The only way to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict is through peaceful negotiations leading to a two-State solution in accordance with the road map.

The international community, including the Security Council, must remain actively engaged in the peace process in the Middle East. Both sides, however, must do more and demonstrate clear political will and commitment to ending this protracted conflict which has threatened global peace and security for more than half a century. In spite of the latest wave of violence and hostilities, we believe that there is a window of opportunity for the new Palestinian and Israeli Governments to put the peace process back on the right track. That window of opportunity must be seized through concrete and immediate action, leading from mutual recognition of the right to exist to the mutual peaceful coexistence of two viable States.

Mr. Manongi (United Republic of Tanzania): The United Republic of Tanzania associates itself with the statement to be made by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Ambassador Hamidon Ali, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Tanzania is gravely concerned about the recent upsurge in violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. Increased rocket attacks against Israel from northern Gaza, as well as Israeli military operations, especially artillery strikes on suspected rocket launch sites, are contributing to a cycle that undermines the prospects for durable peace in the region. We regret that populated areas have come under fire, causing death to innocent civilians, including children. We deeply regret the loss of life and the suffering resulting from the violence. We urge both parties to refrain from any measures which could lead to more violence. We call upon both sides to exercise maximum restraint.

Violence is against the interests of both Israel and Palestine. We reiterate our conviction that Hamas needs to move towards acceptance of the three principles laid out by the Quartet, namely, non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements, including the road map. We agree that the Palestinian Government should be able to take a clear stance against violence and actively seek to gain control over the firing of rockets and suicide bombings.

It is in this sense that we join in condemning the suicide bombing that took place in Tel Aviv this morning. It is also our belief that, for its part, Israel is obliged to take meaningful steps to reduce the suffering of Palestinians by ending blockades, curtailing arbitrary arrests and extrajudicial killings, stopping the demolition of houses and halting settlement activity, including the barrier construction, on occupied territories. Israel should refrain from the use of excessive force and cease targeted killings, which contravene international law. We believe that it is only through peace talks with the Palestinians that the conflict can be resolved and we believe that unilateral action and the resort to force will only make matters worse.

The suspension of monthly transfers of revenues collected by Israel on behalf of the Palestinians must be brought to an end. Continued withholding of this revenue constitutes a serious blow to the cash-strapped Palestinian Government and constrains its capacity to deliver public services to its people. The cut-offs of aid and tax revenues are already crippling the Palestinian treasury. This has made it virtually impossible to pay salaries to Government employees, including police, teachers, medical personnel and others. The failure to transfer tax revenues, together with the suspension of much-needed foreign aid, amounts to collective punishment because it is not only the employees that are affected, but also their dependents. We urge that the flow of revenue to the Palestinians not be interrupted at this hour of need and increased demand.

In conclusion, it is our view that the international community, including key regional actors, must guide the two sides towards negotiations and compromise, leading to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. We believe that the cherished objective of having a viable, democratic, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security is within reach and is attainable.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

Recently, there has been an escalation of tension between Israel and Palestine, with incessant incidents of violence causing heavy casualties on both sides, especially among civilians. China is seriously concerned by this situation. We strongly call on both parties to exercise maximum restraint and take the necessary measures to keep the Middle East from once again falling into the vicious cycle of violence in response to violence.

It has been the consistent view of China that peace in the Middle East can be realized only through peaceful negotiations, not through violence and force. The road map for peace in the Middle East, endorsed by the Security Council, remains the most realistic and practicable programme for the settlement of the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Currently, the crux of the matter is the lack of mutual trust and the deepening of differences between the two sides. The leaders of both sides must show political decisiveness, resume dialogue as soon as possible, reduce and eliminate mutual hostility and, at the same time, fulfil their respective obligations under the road map with a view to finally realizing the vision of two independent States living side by side in peace.

Not long ago, the Palestinian people and the Israeli people used their ballots to make their respective choices on their political future. That was the outcome of democratic processes, and the international community should respect that outcome unreservedly and engage and cooperate with both sides

in the light of the new political reality. The international community should not punish Palestinian civilians by stopping humanitarian assistance simply because of differences in political views. The international community bears a moral responsibility to ensure that the daily life of Palestinian civilians not be affected.

China firmly supports the Middle East peace process and resolutely opposes all forms of terrorist activity. The prolonged existence of the Middle East problem is not only unfavourable to the lasting peace and development of that region but also detrimental to the peace and stability of the whole world. The international community should take practical action and adopt a constructive approach to help Israel and Palestine out of the current deadlock. In this respect, the Security Council bears a special responsibility. China supports the draft presidential statement proposed by Qatar. We find it regrettable that the Council failed to reach consensus on the text, in spite of several days of arduous consultations.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

As another measure to optimize the use of our time, in order to allow as many delegations to take the floor as possible, I will not individually invite speakers to take seats at the table and invite them to resume their seats at the side of the Chamber. When a speaker is taking a floor, the conference officer will seat the next speaker on the list at the table. I thank participants for their understanding and cooperation.

I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is my honour, on behalf of the Group of Arab States, of which I am chairman for this month, to extend to you, Sir, our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. We are fully confident that, with your experience and diplomatic skill, you will lead the work of the Council to a successful outcome. I also extend to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, our thanks and appreciation for his wise conduct of the Council's work last month.

The Arab Group submitted a request to hold a public meeting on the issue in view of the seriousness of the developments in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel, the occupying Power, has, over the past few days, continued an intensive attack against the Gaza Strip in a campaign entitled Operation Southern Arrow. During 48 hours of that campaign, 17 Palestinians lost their lives.

The Israeli army has used heavy weaponry of all kinds, including rockets and attack helicopters, and has indiscriminately shelled farms and civilian houses. The bombing has been so powerful that innocent civilians have been blown to pieces due to the force of the explosions. The number of limbless or headless corpses arriving in hospitals is staggering. Israeli attacks against the Palestinians have continued daily, auguring serious consequences if Israel continues with that violent approach.

This military escalation by Israel is one of a series of measures against the Palestinian Authority intended to punish it and the Palestinian people for having elected, by an overwhelming majority, Hamas, which has been able to form a new Palestinian Government. These measures include a complete boycott of the Palestinian Authority and the severing of all contacts and security coordination with the Palestinians, in violation of international law and the agreements signed between the two parties. The Palestinian people's choice of its own Government was made freely and democratically and was the result of the Palestinian legislative elections that took place on 25 January, reflecting the free will of the Palestinian people as it exercised its democratic rights. Those elections were also certified by international observers to be free and fair.

Based upon our strong belief in democratic choice, we consider that all parties should respect the outcome of that constitutional process in spite of the extremely difficult environment in which the elections were conducted and the continued Israeli military harassment. Immediately after the elections, Israel took a series of measures, including economic punishment through the withholding of tax and customs revenues owed to the Palestinians, in the knowledge that those revenues are rightfully due the Palestinian people.

Israel has also taken other punitive measures by boycotting the elected Palestinian Authority almost completely, and by refusing all support to that Government, thus putting further political pressure on it. In addition, Israel has conducted brutal and

intensive military attacks against the Palestinian people.

We are at a loss to understand what Israel hopes to accomplish by its actions. If it wishes to have a partner in a peace process, it cannot have a better partner than the one freely chosen by the Palestinian people. Those Israeli measures, in addition to others taken over the past few days, have all been aimed at intensifying and escalating the illegal unilateral measures taken against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem.

The Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ehud Olmert, has announced a unilateral plan to demarcate Israel's borders over the next four years, in order to fully control major strategic areas in the West Bank and to maintain extensive settlements in those territories and in East Jerusalem, in an attempt to legitimize the confiscation of those lands. The plan includes a complete denial of the rights of the Palestinian people, in contravention of international law, Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the road map and will thus in practical terms put an end to the two-State solution.

The Israeli occupation is the crux of the conflict in the region. We believe the best solution to all the problem is Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, a halt to unilateral measures that would change the legal status of the Golan, an end to Israel's repeated violations of Lebanese sovereignty and a complete withdrawal from the Shab'a farms in implementation of relevant international resolutions.

The Palestinian people, who have for so long suffered oppression and humiliation under Israeli occupation, are now in greater need than ever of real assistance from the international community with a view to reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question. This must come about by peaceful means, as chosen by the Palestinian people, and not through military measures, which have proven ineffective over the years.

Two weeks ago in Khartoum, on 28 and 29 March, at the eighteenth Arab summit, the importance of reaching a comprehensive and just solution to the Palestinian question through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital was stressed. The summit rejected all unilateral Israeli measures and called for a halt to the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and other Palestinian lands. The Arab summit also called for reactivation of the 2002 Arab peace initiative adopted at Beirut and called on Israel to withdraw completely from all Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as other relevant resolutions, and in conformity with the principle of land for peace.

We demand that Israel put an end to its policy of starving the Palestinians, that it end the economic and political blockade it is imposing upon them and that it cease all its military operations against the Palestinian people.

We call upon the Security Council and the Quartet to shoulder their responsibility with regard to these Israeli violations in order to ensure a comprehensive and peaceful solution of the Palestinian question, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab peace initiative.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the representative of Bahrain for his statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen): I have the distinct honour to speak on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on an important topic, namely the Israeli military bombardment and starvation of the Palestinian people.

But, it would be remiss of me if not to first convey warm congratulations to you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are certain that, given your diplomatic experience and your knowledge of the issues, you will guide the Security Council's work to a successful conclusion. Let me take this opportunity also to express gratitude to the delegation of Argentina for its fine handling of the Security Council's work during its presidency last month.

I will refrain from repeating the arguments I made on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on this issue at the Security Council meeting held on Thursday, 30 March 2006 (see S/PV.5404). Suffice it to reiterate the following points.

The resumption of the massive Israeli bombardment of the Palestinian people in the Gaza

Strip, the extrajudicial killings and the policy of starving the Palestinian people are motivated by the erroneous belief that such policies might lead to the capitulation of the Palestinian people and the imposition of a unilateral settlement that would disadvantage the Palestinian people and benefit the occupier.

We in the Organization of the Islamic Conference believe that those policies are misguided and will not lead to a sustained, peaceful settlement of the dispute. Quite the contrary — they will result in greater bloodshed and instability in a region in dire need, and, I daresay, will, in the final analysis, benefit neither the occupier nor the occupied.

For peace to prevail, Israel, the occupying Power, must be made to respect its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant norms of international humanitarian law, and it must desist forthwith from carrying out these misguided policies.

The intensification of the military campaign against the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, as well as the policy of blocking the import by the Palestinian Authority of necessary food commodities, have no explanation other than to punish the Palestinian people for exercising their inalienable right to select their representatives in free and fair elections.

We do not believe that this is the correct message to send to the region. The international community is therefore in duty bound not to condone a policy that penalizes a people for exercising their right to free choice. Therefore the Security Council — as the organ entrusted with the preservation of international peace and security and the body considered as the cornerstone of the international order — must not fail in its duty to put an end to Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people.

Finally, it is our conviction that if peace is to prevail in the tormented, vital region of the Middle East, no country must be treated as if it were above the law.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank the representative of Yemen for the kind words he addressed to my country.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Malaysia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At the outset, let me congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April 2006. We are fully confident that you will successfully guide the important work of the Council, as you have done on several occasions in the past. Allow me this opportunity also to express appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. César Mayoral of Argentina, for the manner in which he conducted the important work of the Council last month.

The Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its commitment to a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and continues to support the Palestinian people in the exercise of their inalienable right to self-determination; their right to an independent and sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and their right to freedom and dignity.

The Movement further reaffirms its support for the Middle East peace process on the basis of the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative, the principle of the illegality of any territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force, and the road map. Fulfilling the provisions contained in those instruments could lead to the achievement of the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 borders.

Israel should withdraw from all the territories it has occupied since the 1967 war. Israel must realize that, after almost four decades, a military solution is certainly not the answer. In the words of Sun Zi, one of the greatest military strategists of ancient China, "Of all the stratagems, to know when to quit is the best". The time for Israel to quit its occupation of Palestinian territories is now.

The Movement is gravely concerned at the escalating military campaigns launched by Israeli forces in the occupied Palestinian territories last week. The Movement strongly condemns such campaigns, in particular the wilful killing of Palestinian civilians, including extrajudicial killings; the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel; and the siege and collective punishment imposed against the Palestinians, including severe restrictions on the

movement of persons, goods and humanitarian aid workers, further exacerbating the already grave socio-economic debilitation of the Palestinian people. Those acts have led, and could lead in future, to further violent retaliatory measures by the Palestinians. In addition, the Movement is seriously concerned at the reported targeting by Israeli forces of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and of other humanitarian aid agencies and their workers, including ambulances and paramedics, operating in the Palestinian territories.

In the light of the current situation in the region, the Non-Aligned Movement urges Israel in particular to exercise maximum restraint and both sides to take all necessary measures to stop the vicious circle of violence, which has caused so many casualties among innocent civilians and so much destruction to public infrastructure and property. The Movement condemns the killing or injuring of innocent civilians, which is unjustifiable, and condemns all acts of violence and destruction, including terrorism and suicide bombings.

In that regard, the Movement urges the Security Council, bearing in mind its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, immediately to intervene by pressuring Israel to stop all attacks against the Palestinian people, as well as by assisting and supporting the Palestinian Authority in its ongoing efforts to prevail upon groups in its territories to halt all rocket attacks against Israel. The Movement urges both sides to act in conformity with international law and to refrain from taking any steps that could further escalate the violence and exacerbate the already tense situation in the region.

The decision by the Palestinian people to choose, through a free, fair and secure democratic process, their representatives to the Palestinian Legislative Council should be respected. The outcome of the elections in Palestine last January should not be used as a pretext by the international community to cease extending economic and financial assistance and other forms of aid to the Palestinian people. We welcome all financial and humanitarian assistance provided by the international community to meet the needs of the Palestinian people and urge strongly that this be sustained. Any suspension of assistance could lead to a humanitarian catastrophe in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinians should not be punished; they do not deserve to be punished. They deserve much better treatment, and we, the Member States, have the duty to ensure that they receive it.

In that connection, the Non-Aligned Movement renews its call upon Israel to disburse without delay to the Palestinian Authority the full amount of the monthly tax and customs revenues which rightfully belong to the Palestinians, in accordance with the Israeli-Palestinian Protocol signed in Paris in 1994. Those much-needed revenues could greatly alleviate the dire humanitarian conditions and suffering of the Palestinian people, who are in need of food and water, medicine and medical treatment, and education for their children, among other things.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains concerned about the failure of repeated efforts to revive the peace process, and deeply regrets in particular that the road map has yet to be implemented. The Movement continues to note with concern that the Israeli Government has failed to take the necessary first step in accordance with its obligations therein. It has evaded the provisions of the road map and substituted different steps which are inconsistent with international law and relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. It is incumbent upon both Israel and Palestine, as well as in their own interests, to create, with the assistance of the international community, the necessary conditions that could lead to the resumption of negotiations with a view to seeking a just, durable and comprehensive final settlement. Those entail, in particular, the denouncing of violent measures or acts of terrorism and the revoking by Israel of unilateral actions that could further undermine peace and stability in the region.

The Movement renews its call for the intensification of efforts by the Quartet to salvage the road map and to work earnestly towards the full and honest implementation of its provisions.

The Non-Aligned Movement stresses the necessity of upholding international law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine. The Movement further stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, in particular the Security Council, with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects.

The Council is in a position to prevail upon Israel and Palestine to achieve their long-held desire for a just, lasting and comprehensive final settlement. The

Council shoulders the primary responsibility for ensuring that they do so. There is a Chinese proverb which says, "Make a decision when a decision is called for. Hesitation only brings disaster". The Council must not be reluctant to invoke its functions and powers, especially on this question — for the sake of the Palestinians and the Israelis, for the sake of the people in the region and in order to serve and meet the collective interests and desire of our global family of nations, which has clearly pronounced itself repeatedly on this question. The Movement remains hopeful that our collective interests and desire will be translated into reality sooner rather than later.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Pfanzelter (Austria): I have the honour and privilege to speak on behalf of the European Union and the other countries aligning themselves with this statement.

The European Union strongly and unreservedly condemns today's suicide bombing of a restaurant in Tel Aviv, which resulted in the deaths of at least nine people and injured many others. We offer our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and our sympathy to the injured.

The European Union condemns all acts of terror and violence. It expresses its grave concern about recent violent events in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in particular rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza and the escalation of Israeli military operations. We call on both parties to exercise maximum restraint. We urge the Palestinian Authority to ensure security in the areas it controls, as well as the safety of international personnel. We continue to urge the Palestinian Authority to take effective measures against terrorism and violence, notably against suicide attacks and the launching of rockets, and to reform its security services. We call upon Israel to stop the practice of extrajudicial killings, which is contrary to international law. We remind both parties of their obligations under the road map and existing agreements, including the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and the Agreement on Movement and Access.

On 10 April, the External Relations Council of the European Union discussed the situation of the Middle East peace process following the swearing-in of the new Palestinian Government and the result of general elections in Israel.

The External Relations Council noted with grave concern that the new Palestinian Government has not committed itself to the three principles laid out by that Council and the Quartet in their statements of 30 January: non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of existing agreements. It urged the new Palestinian Government to meet and implement those three principles and to commit to President Abbas's platform of peace. That would further the Palestinian people's aspirations to peace and statehood.

Consistent with the Quartet statement of 30 March, the European Union is reviewing its assistance to the Palestinians against the new Government's commitment to those principles. The External Relations Council recalled that the absence of such a commitment would inevitably have an effect on direct assistance to that Government. The European Union, however, will continue to provide necessary assistance to meet the basic needs of the Palestinian population. In this context, it also underlined the importance of improved access and movement, and called on both parties to implement the Agreement on Movement and Access of 15 November 2005.

The External Relations Council reiterated its aim to preserve and pursue the democratic functioning and development of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority. In that context, it emphasized the central role of President Abbas as the highest representative of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization and reiterated its support for him.

The External Relations Council noted the result of the Israeli general elections and underlined the importance of a strong commitment by the new Israeli Government to work towards a negotiated solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on existing agreements, relevant Security Council resolutions and the principles laid down in the road map.

On final-status issues, the European Union will not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties. Our Council called on Israel to desist from any action, such as settlement activities and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land, that is contrary to international law and threatens the viability of an agreed two-State solution. The Council urged Israel to

take steps to improve the humanitarian and economic situation of the Palestinians, including by resuming transfers of the withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues.

The External Relations Council welcomed the recent statement of acting Prime Minister Olmert on seeking negotiations with the Palestinians and the positive response to it by President Abbas. In that context, the Council looks forward to early engagement between the new Israeli Government and the Palestinians in order to advance a just, viable and lasting solution which would bring peace to both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples.

In conclusion, the European Union reaffirms the central role of the Quartet in promoting progress in the peace process.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Yousfi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): I should like at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April, and to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, for his outstanding work last month.

I would also like to thank you, Sir, for having urgently convened this meeting in response to a request to address the recent dangerous and disturbing developments that have taken place in Palestine. These events are of concern to my country, and they have serious, profound and diverse repercussions for international peace and security.

It is worrying to observe, yet again, that the Security Council failed to discharge its responsibilities with regard to the maintenance of international peace and security when, yet again, it did not respond to the aggression that Israel had clearly committed in violation of its obligations under international law as an occupying force. We regret that several days ago the Council failed to adopt a presidential statement denouncing the serious deterioration in the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories following the daily attacks by the Israeli army against the Palestinian population that we so firmly condemn. We appeal to the international community and to the Quartet to do their utmost in order to put an end to the ongoing aggression by Israel against the Palestinian people.

The recent hostile acts perpetrated by Israel add to the long list of aggression against the Palestinian people and of the violations of the most basic human rights that it has perpetrated for decades. These include the illegal settlements, the demolition of homes, arbitrary detentions, extrajudiciary executions, the building of an illegal separation wall on Palestinian territory and the choking of the Palestinian economy. All of these illegal practices run counter to international humanitarian law and to the numerous resolutions that the Security Council and the General Assembly have adopted since 1967.

It is in this context of impunity that on 14 March Israel attacked the prison in Jericho, kidnapping Palestinian detainees in defiance of international accords and conventions. We call for their release to the Palestinian Authority without delay.

The Security Council must denounce these acts of aggression. Unilateral measures and the policy of fait accompli must cease, for they could prejudice the outcome of the negotiations that are to lead to the establishment of an independent, sovereign Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The latest Palestinian legislative elections have proven the ability of the Palestinian people to organize free and democratic elections in conditions that objectively are extremely trying. We express our consideration and our respect for the achievements of the Palestinian people. We reiterate our tireless support to the Palestinian Authority and to its institutions, and we welcome the national Palestinian dialogue that has responsibly led to the formation of a national Government. The Council must call upon the international community, specifically the Quartet, to respect the will and choice of the Palestinian people.

We believe that the suspension of international aid to the Palestinian Authority on the heels of their democratic choice could only further destabilize the Middle East. For our part, we believe that freezing assistance is an unfair and unjustified decision. The international community should end its policy of double standards in dealing with the Palestinian question. It should adopt equitable measures with respect to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to ease their daily plight and the acts of aggression against them.

The just and comprehensive peace to which the people of the region are aspiring is an indivisible

whole and cannot be achieved without a full withdrawal from occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a Farms, and without the return to the borders of 4 June 1967. The framework for achieving this peace does exist and is set forth by the Arab Peace Initiative and by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). These need to be implemented resolutely.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Security Council is meeting today amid a situation in the occupied Palestinian territories that can be described as dangerous and volatile. The last few days have witnessed and continue to witness a dangerous Israeli military escalation against the civilian Palestinian population in Gaza, the West Bank and other areas of the Palestinian occupied territories. These events have caused the killing of more than 20 people in the last few days alone as a result of the relentless shelling and bombardment of Palestinian towns and villages, as well as the continuation of extrajudicial killings and the closure of any channels of communication between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority and its President.

This situation is deteriorating by the day and is creating a vicious circle of violence and counter-violence, resulting in deaths and casualties on both sides. It signals a humanitarian and political catastrophe that calls for an effective and swift response from the Security Council in order to discharge its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

There is no doubt that the suicide attack that took place in Tel Aviv this morning, which has resulted in the deaths of a number of Israelis, reaffirms the need for the Security Council to intervene immediately in order to stop this cycle of violence between the two parties.

The latest escalation in the Palestinian occupied territories falls within a longstanding policy of systematic and deliberate practices by Israel against the Palestinian people. These practices include strengthening the blockade, isolating Palestinian towns and villages, restricting the movement of people and commodities and closing crossing points, as well as hastening the building and further expansion of the Israeli settlements and acquiring more Palestinian lands, and the acquisition of additional land through the separation wall.

All of these practices have been intensified in the wake of the results of the Palestinian legislative elections. The Palestinian people have exercised their right through a fair and democratic election that we all called for. Therefore, we all have the duty to respect those results instead of punishing the Palestinian people, and not to stop the peace process or to cause further deterioration of the humanitarian situation of our brotherly Palestinian people.

The Israeli Government is attempting to exploit the results of the Palestinian elections by intensifying its violations against the Palestinian people and to entrench its occupation of the Palestinian territories under the pretext that there is no partner with which to negotiate on the Palestinian side. That attempt requires a firm stand on the part of the international community.

If the new Palestinian Government has its own policies, which were accepted by the Palestinian people, those policies cannot be changed and directed towards the resumption of the peace process, complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the establishment of a viable Palestinian State through unilateral measures or unilateral Israeli withdrawals that entrench the further occupation of Palestinian territories. Nor can they be achieved through an economic blockade of the Palestinian people or by refusing to provide them with any assistance, or attempting to break their will through relentless attacks against them.

Change can come about only through dialogue, persuasion and the achievement of respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people, ensuring their dignity and humanity, as well as the restoration of their reserved rights, foremost among which is the right to self-determination and the right to live in their independent State, side by side with the State of Israel.

At a time when Arab leaders — most recently last month in Khartoum — have reaffirmed their commitment to the 2002 Arab peace initiative, which called for the establishment of normal relations with Israel in return for Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, Israel has, sadly, responded by adopting a policy of unilateral measures, with the aim of forcing an artificial settlement of the dispute through a

unilateral demarcation of Israel's borders that would preserve for Israel large portions of Palestinian land in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Jordan River Valley and the large settlement blocs. Those actions would deal a death blow to any chances of achieving a just settlement of the question of Palestine and would threaten the prospects for achieving peace between Arab countries and Israel.

The delegation of Egypt once again reaffirms that any settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be reached through an agreement between the two parties in a negotiating process. In that context, we call upon the Israeli Government to enter into direct negotiations on final-status issues with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, without any preconditions other than the legal terms of reference of the peace process. Those terms include the Oslo agreements, the Sharm el-Sheikh accords and the road map. Along with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), General Assembly resolution 194 (III), other relevant resolutions and the principle of land for peace, they constitute the only way to achieve our long-awaited objective.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the latest developments in the occupied Palestinian territories have brought the peace process to the threshold of a crucial and pivotal decision that will determine its future and that of the region: either to return to the negotiating table to achieve a just and comprehensive peace or to slide into the abyss of violence and suffering for all peoples of the region without exception. It is incumbent upon the Security Council to take immediate measures to put an end to this miserable situation. In that context, we followed last week's Security Council negotiations and consultations to issue a presidential statement calling upon Israel to put an end to its attacks against the Palestinian people and to abide by its international obligations. Despite the failure to date of those attempts, today's events in Israel — which we condemn, as we condemn Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory — must provide an incentive for the Security Council to discharge its responsibilities and adopt a balanced statement that breaks the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence and leads to a resumption of final-status negotiations with a view to establishing a Palestinian State.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): On behalf of the delegation of Pakistan, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Chinese delegation on the skilful manner in which you are guiding the work of the Security Council this month. I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Mayoral and his delegation on the successful Argentine presidency in March.

This meeting was convened to consider the latest acts in the tragedy of the Palestinian people. The delegation of Pakistan endorses the concern expressed in the statements delivered on behalf of the Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement by the Permanent Representatives of Yemen and Malaysia, respectively, regarding the bombardment conducted against the Palestinians in recent days and the measures that are being taken by Israel that increase the suffering and deprivation of the Palestinian population. Equally, I would like to express our condemnation of the act of terrorism today, which resulted in death or injury for several Israeli civilians.

Events over the last three months have transformed the hopes for peace in the Middle East into foreboding and fear. Hopes for peace ran high in recent years, with agreement that a final settlement to the Palestinian-Israeli dispute should be based on the principle of land for peace, the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Summit initiative of 2002. The process to achieve a two-State solution was spelled out in the Quartet's road map. Despite questions about the illegal separation wall, West Bank settlement activity and the frequent illegal execution of Palestinians by Israel, as well as acts of terrorism against Israelis, hope for implementation of the road map remained alive. Palestinian groups had agreed to halt anti-Israeli violence. Suicide attacks declined. Most important, Israel withdrew completely, even if unilaterally, from Gaza. The Palestinians then elected Abu Mazen as President.

The positive trends and optimistic mood have all but evaporated following the Palestinian parliamentary elections, which were encouraged by the international community and were free and fair. It is a supreme irony that this democratic exercise — of a kind so widely encouraged in the developing world, and especially in the Middle East — has led to a situation where the

prospects for a peaceful settlement have dimmed almost to darkness.

The challenges before the international community are three.

The first is how to end the massive human suffering of the Palestinian people and prevent chaos in Gaza and the West Bank, when revenues and assistance to the Palestinian Authority have been terminated and targeted killings and artillery bombings continue.

The second is how to maintain peace between Israel and the Palestinians and resume negotiations, given the wide gulf that has now appeared between their positions.

The third is how to prevent actions being taken by Israel that could unilaterally create realities that would make a negotiated settlement based on the principle of land for peace far more difficult, and perhaps impossible.

There are of course no ready answers to those questions, for the moment. Yet, one fact should be evident: the United Nations, including the Security Council and the Secretary-General, must now play the central role in responding to those challenges. The United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, has a direct responsibility in this conflict, flowing from Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Moreover, other interlocutors have, in one way or another, themselves excluded their ability to intercede with all the concerned parties. The United Nations is the only player that can fill the role of mediator, facilitator and peacemaker.

First, therefore, in order to meet the basic human needs of the Palestinian people and to prevent the breakdown of law and order in the Palestinian territories, the United Nations and its agencies should maintain and enlarge their assistance to the Palestinian people, not terminate or restrict it. Although others have ended assistance to the Palestinian Authority, the United Nations and its agencies can work out arrangements to channel such assistance as is available multilaterally and bilaterally in ways that can strengthen political cohesion and order rather than heighten division and disorder. In particular, the political authority of President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority should be preserved and strengthened. We hope that the Secretary-General and concerned agencies will take urgent steps to identify the human and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people and the urgent requirements of the Palestinian Authority, and to mobilize a coordinated response from the world community.

Secondly, arrangements need to be elaborated to preserve peace between Israeli forces and Palestinian security forces, as well as other armed groups and militias. Here again, if other interlocutors are unavailable, the United Nations can and must play a central role in evolving arrangements for maintenance of a durable ceasefire and non-violence, including respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention. We trust that the Secretary-General will authorize the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and his Personal Representative, Mr. Alvaro de Soto, to help the parties in evolving such arrangements for the maintenance of peace.

The Special Coordinator could also be helpful in exploring the basis for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and in resurrecting consensus on the elements and process for a final settlement. The new Palestinian Government, led by Hamas, has been well advised to respond to the ground realities, especially the existence of Israel and existing agreements, and to eschew resort to violence. Obviously, recognition of realities is a mutual process. Neither Israel nor the international community can ignore the Palestinian reality either, including the democratic choice of the Palestinian people. And if the Hamas Government were to emerge — hopefully soon — as a responsible player in a negotiating process, there would surely be justification for reconsidering its description by some States as a terrorist organization.

Thirdly, Israel and its newly elected Government will, we hope, be equally persuaded to desist from plans for a unilateral solution. Unilateralism, as we have witnessed elsewhere, is unlikely to promote a stable or sustainable peace in the Holy Land. Therefore, in the process of mutual confidence-building, Israel should halt the further construction of the separation barrier and Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank. Those actions will jeopardize the objective of creating a viable, democratic, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. It would also jeopardize the resolution of final status issues, including, importantly, the status of East Jerusalem and the holy places.

The Palestinian tragedy — including the occupation of some of Islam's holiest sites in East Jerusalem — is at the heart of the turmoil in the Middle East. It is also the principal root cause of the humiliation and anger in the Arab and Islamic world — anger which breeds extremism and often spawns acts of terrorism. A just solution for Palestine is not just a regional imperative; it is a primary precondition for global peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I call on the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) (spoke in Arabic): My delegation would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are confident that your diplomatic expertise and political knowledge will galvanize the work of the Council and prompt it to assume its role in the maintenance of international peace and security.

My delegation also wishes to convey its thanks and appreciation to the Ambassador of Argentina and his staff for their efforts in the presidency of the Council last month.

My delegation is gravely concerned over the Security Council's failure once again to shoulder its responsibilities in the maintenance of international peace and security in an important and sensitive region of the world — the Middle East. That is due mainly to the selectivity and double standards applied by some to the question of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the Arab side complies with the Security Council's resolutions, despite their unjust nature, some States members of the Security Council continue to oppose the Council's adoption of any resolution condemning Israel's policies in the Arab territories and its lack of compliance with the Council's resolutions.

The question we must ask is: Why does the situation in the Middle East continue to deteriorate and why are we still caught up in a cycle of violence? The answer lies in the double standards and failure of the protectors of Israel earnestly to seek a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel's ongoing aggression against the Palestinian people and its use of the most heinous means of oppression and terror with the utmost disregard for ethical, political and legal norms and considerations confirm that it is not yet convinced of the need to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the region. One case in point is its ongoing attempts to storm Arab villages and towns and Palestinian refugee camps in the occupied territories, its commission of further assassinations and killings, its imposition of collective punishment on the Palestinian people, and its continued establishment of settlements. Israel has also continued to build the separation wall, in clear contravention of the opinion of the International Court of Justice and the resolutions of the General Assembly and in flagrant defiance of international humanitarian law and international law.

In addition to the deteriorating security situation in the occupied Arab territories, exacerbated by the killing and destruction wrought by the Israeli military machine, the humanitarian and economic situation has been pushed to the brink of tragedy by the siege and closure policies followed by the Israeli occupying authorities in a manner intended to humiliate and to mete out collective punishment to the people of Palestine, who embraced democracy in the recent legislative elections, which were held in transparency and integrity.

My delegation calls on the international community to respect the will of the Palestinian people in their choice of leaders, not to interfere in their internal affairs, and to continue to provide them with the financial support that will allow them to overcome the difficulties caused by the ongoing Israeli occupation.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is no better than that in the occupied Palestinian territories. That is due to Israel's oppression of our people in the occupied Syrian Golan in the context of the imposition of Israeli identity upon them, their detention in great numbers, and the ongoing establishment of settlements on their land. Despite the Security Council's adoption of resolution 497 (1981), which declared null and void the Israeli decision to annex the Syrian Golan, Israel continues to plan further settlements, to intensify its occupation and to flout the will of the international community by its non-compliance with that and many other resolutions adopted by the General Assembly.

Syria has repeatedly expressed its hope for the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and for the unconditional pursuit of the peace process, despite the fact that the decisions of international legitimacy do not constitute

preconditions. Israel has met those calls with further intransigence and opposition in an attempt to shirk its responsibility in establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the region. That in itself is proof of Israel's lack of desire to bring about peace, security and stability in the region. It confirms that it is Israel's aim to destabilize the region by continuing its policies of aggression and expansion, which make the hope of realizing peace elusive.

Six decades have passed in the Middle East conflict. The Arab people look forward to the day when they can live in peace and security like any other people in the world. The peace to which we all aspire can come about only if Israel withdraws fully from all the occupied Arab territories in the Syrian Golan, the Lebanese Sheb'a farms and the Palestinian territories, to the 4 June 1967 borders, and if it complies with resolutions of international legitimacy, particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and with the principle of land for peace and the Madrid terms of reference. Israel should also accept the Arab peace initiative adopted at the 2002 Arab summit, held in Beirut, and confirmed at subsequent Arab summits.

The repeated claims by the Israeli representative, accusing Syria and others of terrorism, are remarkably cynical, because the Israeli representative is trying to cover up the war crimes committed by his Government day after day against the defenceless Palestinian people. The daily military acts perpetrated by the Israeli occupying army prove the State terror perpetrated by Israel against the Arab people in the occupied territories.

Israel should be held accountable under international law for its acts. Israel has displaced millions of Palestinians and Syrians since occupying the Arab territories. They live as refugees in many countries, including Syria, which has hosted these refugees and has provided them with the means of which Israel has deprived them. Israel is now denying these people the right to return to their homeland, which Israel has transformed into military bases and illegitimate settlements. It prevents them from expressing their opinions and from realizing their dream of establishing their homeland with Jerusalem as its capital.

It is also ironic that the representative of Israel tries to turn the facts upside down, presenting Israel as a victim while the other side is the gladiator. Everyone knows who the occupier is; everyone knows who uses the most modern weapons against a defenceless people and who terrorizes people; and everyone knows who is the victim of occupation and of inhumane practices. Israel does not hesitate to kill children and women. It pays no heed to the number of victims who have fallen since the eruption of the intifada: more than 4,000 civilians have died so far.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I call now on the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): Mr. President, let me first express my gratitude to you for convening this meeting and for giving us the opportunity to contribute our views on the disturbing situation in the Middle East.

The delegation of Indonesia is deeply disturbed and concerned by the renewed violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. We believe that it is important that these developments immediately cease in the interest of the peace process and of the peoples of both Palestine and Israel. In that regard, my delegation fully associates itself with statements made by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and by the representative of Yemen on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).

The recent military operations of the occupying Power, Israel, against the Palestinian people have been excessive and ruthless. In several missile strikes, 21 Palestinians, including 2 children, were killed. The media have reported that about 300 rounds are being fired into the Gaza Strip each day from cannons, tanks, warships, helicopters and drones. Although Israel claims that its action is in response to the firing at civil targets in Israel from northern Gaza, the indiscriminate nature of the response and the scale of the innocent civilian toll it has inflicted bear no relationship to the rockets fired into its territory.

In addition, this Israeli action is an illegal act and a violation of international humanitarian law, and we call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility and stop Israel's aggression against the Palestinian people. Let us be clear: the situation in Palestine is a delicate one and the road to peace is cluttered with all kinds of challenges. It does not need the addition of further problems. Among those problems is the financial crisis currently buffeting the Palestinian Authority. Its legitimate funds, derived

from taxes being collected by Israeli authorities, have been withheld following the recent election in Palestine, which was widely acknowledged by the international community as fair, transparent and democratic. In addition, food commodities needed by the Palestinian Authority are being blocked.

Given the facts as we know them, the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, if that is the objective of Israel, can only escalate the insecurity in the area and make peace a more distant dream. In our view, this continued situation would prevent the Palestinian Authority not only from continuing to provide basic services to the Palestinian people, but also from providing the necessary administrative structure within which to continue to explore the road to peace.

Therefore, we urge the international community to give the new Government a chance. In this regard, my delegation welcomes the commitment made by the Palestinian President, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to continue to pursue peace in the Middle East on the basis of the road map of the Quartet and previous resolutions of the United Nations regarding the settlement of the issue of Palestine. It is our hope and expectation that the new Government and forthcoming Governments will adhere to this path.

My delegation once again calls upon the international community, as these developments arise, to assert itself on the side of peace. Only by consistently by putting the issue of peace into perspective and seeking to prevail on both sides to act more responsibly can we move ahead and ensure a return to the path of peace.

In this regard, my delegation also wishes to draw attention to the suicide bombing in a busy area of Tel Aviv earlier today, in which 10 people, including the bomber, were killed and dozens of others were wounded. This tragic loss of life in the middle of the Passover holiday does nothing for the cause of peace.

Finally, it is with a deep sense of concern and responsibility that we call on the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, in the interest of the peace process, to urgently find ways to halt the cycle of violence and to exercise restraint. The cycle of violence has been proven to have no redeeming feature and cannot yield peace. In the end, it is peace that is in the heart of the ordinary people of both sides, and a focus on the need to return to the negotiating table is imperative.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I call now on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Zarif (Islamic Republic of Iran): Mr. President, allow me to join those who preceded me in congratulating you and your predecessor on ably leading the work of the Council.

The Council has been convened to debate yet another in a series of repeated and grave crimes perpetrated by the Israeli regime against the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories. Indeed, in the course of the past six decades, Palestinians have been subjected to daily brutality by the Israeli regime. The systematic pattern of violations of the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people and massive breaches of international law and international humanitarian law by Israel have continued unabated, resulting in the killing of nearly 4,000 Palestinians just since September 2000.

Recent military operations against Palestinian civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, have only added to the misery and suffering that the Palestinian people have long endured. As a consequence of that military aggression, the casualties and destruction inflicted on the Palestinian people continue to mount. In fact, Israel's deadly air strikes and shelling of Gaza are part of a larger policy characterized by State terrorism, expansionism, aggression and oppression.

Increased military operations in densely populated areas, especially in Gaza, indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli army, the practice of collective punishment, extrajudicial killings, targeted assassinations, expansion of settlements and the attack by Israeli forces on the Jericho prison — which happened only a few minutes after American and British observers left the prison — are but a few examples of Israeli breaches of basic international standards and law.

Moreover, in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the unambiguous calls of the international community, the Israeli regime not only continues the construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territories, but has even accelerated plans for its completion. At the same time, settlement construction and land confiscation in the West Bank and other parts of the Palestinian territories are continuing unabated.

As eloquently stated by the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in last month's meeting of the Council (S/PV.5404), Israel has continued its unlawful activities in the occupied territories with the intention of undermining the prospects for establishing the Palestinian State, and approximately 12,000 Israelis have established themselves in the West Bank colonies in recent months, while only 9,000 have been evacuated from Gaza and the northern West Bank.

The impunity with which Israel has been allowed to carry out its war crimes has emboldened it to continue such policies and practices. It is therefore high time for the international community to take effective measures to protect and enforce the basic rights of the Palestinian people and to help put an end to their suffering caused by the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel.

The Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, should live up to that immense duty by preventing Israel from continuing to commit atrocities and flout the will of the international community, as incorporated in numerous United Nations resolutions. Regrettably, the Council has thus far failed to take any serious and tangible action, or even to attempt to implement its own modest and limited decisions on the Palestinian question, due to the unconditional support extended to Israel by a permanent member of the Council. It is regrettable that such a failure has become a commonplace feature of the Council, even in the wake of the most atrocious crimes committed by Israel.

The recent opposition of the same permanent member to the adoption of two presidential statements on the Palestinian issue in the course of the past five weeks cannot but be regarded as explicit support for the unlawful activities persistently pursued by Israel. In fact, the Council cannot retain its credibility and authority when its work is labeled an exercise in group therapy and while it has been ineffective and inactive in addressing the Israeli crimes in Palestine as the gravest situation of international concern.

The Palestinian Legislative Council elections, which reflected the free will of the Palestinian people in exercising their democratic rights, were a democratic accomplishment for which the Palestinian people should be congratulated and admired. The democratic choice of the Palestinian people deserves to receive the respect and support of the international community.

The Israeli decision to halt the transfer of taxes due the Palestinians is nothing but the blackmailing of the Palestinian people for exercising their democratic rights. Similarly, the withholding of aid to the Palestinian Authority by certain countries amounts to punishment of the Palestinians for exercising their basic right in choosing their own representatives. In fact, by taking such inadmissible punitive measures against a nation, the principles of democracy and democratic choice of the people are breached by those who often pretend to preach them.

Israel should disburse to the Palestinian Authority, without further delay, the full amount of the monthly tax and custom revenues which rightfully belong to the Palestinian people. Besides, the international community should continue to provide financial and economic grants and assistance to the Palestinian Authority so as to avoid any dangerous repercussions in the day-to-day lives of the Palestinian people. The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has done its share in financially assisting the Palestinian Authority in order to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people, which has deepened as a result of the restrictions on aid applied by certain countries.

In the context of Israel's defiance of the international community, particular reference should be made to the infamous Israeli nuclear weapons programme, which is a showcase of five decades of concealment and deception and total disregard for the demands of the international community, as echoed in the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) 2000 Review Conference, which specifically called upon Israel to accede to the NPT immediately and without any condition.

Nuclear weapons in the hands of a regime with an unprecedented record of State terrorism and resort to aggression and the threat of force against other countries present a real threat to regional and global peace and security and to the non-proliferation regime. That threat needs to be urgently and decisively addressed by the international community, and the initiative for the creation of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East should be actively pursued.

The question of Palestine lies at the core of the Middle East issue. Deterioration of the situation in Palestine not only threatens the wider region, but also adversely impacts global peace and security. The recent Israeli war crimes in Gaza have led to more instability and inflame tensions and threaten to further destabilize the situation in the region. The Council cannot and should not turn a blind eye to such a critical situation. Those who prevent the Council from addressing the situation should be held accountable for the escalation of the crisis and instability.

It is evident that achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. Peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved through aggression, State terrorism, intimidation and occupation. We are convinced that a durable peace in Palestine will be possible through justice, an end to discrimination, an end to the occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, the return of all Palestinian refugees, a democratic mechanism through which all inhabitants of Palestine as well as the Palestinians driven out of their homeland would have the possibility to determine their future in a democratic and peaceful fashion, and the establishment of a democratic Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Finally, I do not wish to take the time of the Council to respond to the irresponsible claims of the Israeli representative. I should only like to point out that the Islamic Republic of Iran has officially declared its commitment to the fundamental principle of the Charter to refrain from the threat or use of force against any Member of the United Nations.

On the other hand, the daily barrage of illegal threats relating to the resort to force by officials of the Israeli regime, recent instances of which started in December 2003 and continue to date, requires urgent and serious attention by the Council. At the very least, the Council should demand that the Israeli regime abandon its policy of flouting international law and the Charter of the United Nations and cease and desist immediately from resorting to the threat of the use of force.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The next speaker on my list is the representative of Saudi Arabia, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to join previous speakers in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I am certain that your wisdom and experience will ensure the success of the Council's work. I should like also to thank your predecessor for the outstanding manner in which he led the work of the Council last month.

The suffering of the Palestinian people is the tragic result of the failure to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine. The occupation by Israel of Palestinian territories as well as the Syrian Golan and the Shaba'a Farms represents a flagrant violation of international law and a clear challenge to the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and to the peace process begun in Madrid in 1991.

Resort to violence and extremism has resulted in the marginalization of other parties that are attempting to deal with the situation. The bloodshed and violence between the two parties is driven by the Israelis' obsession with security and by Palestinian despair, so that for both parties the cycle of violence has become a fatal, infernal spiral.

The continued Israeli occupation and the fact that the Israeli Government is evading its responsibilities and using excessive force is what is compelling Palestinians to commit suicide. Indeed, all other ways have been refused them, their dignity has been violated and their rights flouted.

Israel has always relied on its military superiority, because it is convinced that it is force and not justice that will resolve problems with Arabs and Palestinians in its favour. The paralysis of the international community with respect to putting an end to the Israeli occupation has enabled Israel to continue to hinder the peace process and to sidestep all of its commitments under fallacious pretexts. Thus Israel continues to annex territory and to change the latter's demographic character. It continues to flout the relevant Security Council resolutions and to perpetrate acts of aggression without regard for the repercussions of such violence, taking steps that give the impression that it believes itself above any criticism or condemnation.

Israel is also trying to circumvent any party that might try to find a solution to the problem. It rejects all solutions and persists in finding pretexts to continue its

occupation of Palestinian territories and to deny the Palestinian people their rights. The question has never been whether Israel is trying to find a peace partner or not. On the contrary, it destroys its partner — morally, politically and economically.

Israel is clearly trying to put an end to the Palestinian question and unilaterally to establish a road map for the Jewish State, so as to drive the Palestinians to despair, provoking them to carry out acts of violence and then calling them terrorists.

Blood and despair can never serve as the basis for good relations among peoples. Pictures of blood-soaked bodies and mutilated limbs among the rubble and bombed-out cars are testimony to the violence resulting from arrogance and the use of force. Israel has committed a great many injustices, forgetting that force belongs only to him who possesses it, that is to say, to God.

Israel is strong because of the assistance it obtains and because of the use of double standards. No one could deny that injustice has been done and that justice will finally triumph. Israel must understand that it will pay the price if it refuses the opportunity of peace offered by the Arabs.

Saudi Arabia calls on the international community and on regional and international players, especially the Quartet, to find a way of bringing about peace and security in the Middle East region, while implementing the peace process whereby the Arab States would guarantee Israel a full peace. Israel, for its part, must withdraw from all Arab territories occupied since June 1967; a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, must be established; and a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees must be found. In that way, the interests of the States of the region and of the world as a whole could be met through the implementation of the road map, in the framework of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and internally binding resolutions.

The President *(spoke in Chinese)*: The next speaker on my list is the representative of Cuba, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Malmierca Diaz (Cuba) *(spoke in Spanish)*: At the outset, I should like, on behalf of the Cuban delegation, to express our satisfaction at seeing you, Sir, preside over the work of the Security Council this month.

Cuba fully supports the statements made earlier by the representatives of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Group of Arab States.

Once again history is repeating itself. Once again we are witnessing an escalation of military attacks by Israel against the Palestinian people, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which is terrorizing the civilian population and causing death and destruction. It has become commonplace for Israeli military jets to launch missiles against Palestinian civilians and to pursue the illegal policy of extrajudicial executions, in flagrant violation of international law, including international humanitarian law.

The recent hostile actions by Israel add to its decades-long record of aggression and violations of the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people. It is no secret that the Israeli Government will continue its practice of openly defying the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as the norms of international law, as long as the Security Council's lack of action and passivity persist. The Palestinian people will continue to suffer the consequences of those attacks as long as the hypocrisy and double standards of some continue to prevail in the Security Council.

The United States has already exercised its right of veto on issues relating to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories 29 times in the Council, to say nothing of the numerous threats to use the veto or to block positions in informal consultations behind closed doors, which have prevented the adoption of many resolutions and presidential statements. Its modus operandi is well known, as evidenced last month in the case of the draft statement prepared by the delegation of Qatar following Israel's attack against the Jericho prison. On this occasion, too, the Security Council has been unable to make a statement on developments. The United States has once again prevented it from doing so, always introducing new amendments and new demands when any attempt is made to accommodate it. It has thus accomplished its objective of paralyzing the Council and preventing any statement on the issue.

The least we can expect from this body in the current circumstances is that it condemn the new escalation and demand that Israel stop its attacks immediately. By its silence, the Security Council has

become complicit in the actions of the Israeli Government. Cuba once again demands that the Government of Israel fulfil its legal obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and respect the numerous resolutions on the question of the Middle East adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. İlkin (Turkey): Let me start by congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. My warmest thanks and congratulations go also to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Argentina.

Turkey has aligned itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. However, I would like to touch upon a number of points which we deem fundamental, given the current situation in the region.

It is indeed unfortunate that the window of opportunity created by Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank could not be capitalized upon so as to lead to a genuine political dialogue and thus to a permanent solution of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

We were, once again, distressed to hear today that a number of innocent people lost their lives or were seriously injured by a suicide bomb attack in Tel Aviv. We condemn that horrendous act. We are equally saddened to see innocent civilians being killed or maimed by punitive military operations. Neither resort to violence leading to such horrendous acts nor resort to military force is any remedy for political issues and problems. Resorting to violence and force only breeds further violence and force.

The lack of confidence between the two sides, with surging acts of violence on the one hand and the use of force on the other, is inevitably leading to a vicious circle, which needs to be broken. We are quite concerned about the future of this region.

While the outcome of democratic elections cannot be contested, it is equally important that the Governments assuming power through such elections adopt and abide by the well-defined and established principles of democratic regimes. At this decisive moment in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Turkey strongly encourages both sides to pursue pragmatic policies.

It is our ardent view that the Palestinian and the Israeli leaders have responsibilities and obligations for the well-being of their respective peoples, as well as for regional peace, security and stability. We urge both the Palestinian Authority and Israel to take tangible steps with a view to re-establishing the platform of dialogue for the resumption of the peace negotiations based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map and the vision of two States, as well as the principle of land for peace. In this context, we also must emphasize that both parties must refrain from unilateral actions that might prejudge a final settlement.

The long-awaited peace, security, socio-economic development and overall progress in the Middle East cannot be attained unless the Palestinian question is resolved through a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement. Turkey attaches great importance and is ready to contribute to those efforts by the international community to encourage both sides to adopt more constructive policies. With this objective in mind, Turkey stands ready to work with the international community to facilitate meaningful progress in the Middle East peace process.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mrs. Núñez de Odremán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We would also like to express our gratitude to Ambassador Mayoral for his work during the month of March.

We endorse the comments made by the representative of Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

We are meeting in the Security Council today to consider the regrettable events that have recently taken place in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In response to those events, we are morally obligated to express some opinions and to make a contribution on behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

If international peace and security are to be maintained, relations between States, regardless of the ideology of those States, must be in strict conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and generally recognized principles and norms of international relations, in particular, full respect for all human rights, the non-use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, non-intervention and non-interference in the internal or external affairs of States and peoples or with respect to their natural resources, and the principle of the self-determination of peoples and their freedom from colonial or neo-colonial domination, foreign occupation or racist regimes.

In Venezuela, we are convinced that sovereignty resides exclusively with the people. The future of the Palestinian people can be determined only by the Palestinians themselves. We cannot judge people when they choose their leaders; that would be contrary to democracy.

In Venezuela, we are also convinced that in order for violence to cease in both the Israeli and Palestinian territory, full control over their territory must be returned to the Palestinian people. Peace cannot exist while the occupation continues, since occupation will always be rejected by the people. Similarly, we must stop the military actions of the Israelis in that territory, which succeed only in claiming innocent victims.

We believe that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem — the nucleus of the Arab-Israeli conflict — must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, endorsed by the General Assembly, regarding the construction of the Israeli wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, as well as on the following fundamental principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace, without any form of intervention, within internationally recognized borders; and, finally, the recognition of the inalienable rights the Palestinian people, in particular their right to self-determination and to development. We, therefore, do not believe in a new demarcation of the borders between Palestine and Israel. Ultimately, this would further worsen problems in the territory. Moreover, we believe that suspension of financial aid imposed on the Government and the people of Palestine is a bad mistake. These coercive and inhuman measures affect only the people, women, children and men alike.

As a peace-loving country, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela calls for a comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We hope that the negotiations to that end will be carried out in conditions that guarantee genuine self-determination for the Palestinian people and bring peace to the Middle East region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to Mr. Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Sir, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I am convinced that, under your able leadership, the work of the Council will be carried out constructively and efficiently.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessor, Ambassador César Mayoral, Permanent Representative of Argentina, on the exemplary manner in which he steered the work of the Council during the month of March.

I am grateful to you, Mr. President, and to the other members of the Council for having given me the opportunity, in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to participate in this important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Once again, the Council is meeting to consider the very troubling situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. The violence in the West Bank and, particularly, in the Gaza Strip, is escalating at an alarming pace. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have intensified military action, stepping up extrajudicial assassinations and the firing of missiles and artillery rounds at Palestinian targets. The number of Palestinian civilian casualties is mounting, with children among those killed and injured. Despite the deaths of innocent civilians, the IDF continues to shell targets in the Gaza Strip, causing more death and destruction. At the same time, the firing of Qassam rockets from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel shows no signs of abating, provoking violent response by the Israel Defense Forces. All these acts have no

justification whatsoever and are violations of international law.

For the same reason, the Committee condemns in the strongest possible terms today's suicide attack in Tel Aviv that killed at least nine and wounded dozens of innocent civilians. The current escalation of violence is reaching dangerous levels. This situation could sink into an uncontrollable quagmire unless reason and calm prevail.

These tragic developments risk destroying what little hope remains for the Palestinian Authority under President Mahmoud Abbas and the incoming Israeli Government to explore ways of reopening dialogue and returning to peace talks. The Palestinian population, already suffering under miserable living conditions, is not only further degraded and humiliated, but also has to face increasing danger day by day.

We call on Israel immediately to halt military operations and the excessive use of force. We call on both sides to cease without delay all acts of violence, to exercise utmost restraint so as to allow calm to return. The Committee believes that the Security Council should live up to its responsibility and help end the bloodshed and misery in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel must stop its military incursions into Palestinian land and its targeted killings of Palestinians, and must lift the severe restrictions on the movement and daily life of the Palestinian people.

In this context, we are very concerned about recent decisions by some major donors to suspend aid to the Palestinian Authority. The assistance of the international community has been so critical in providing the most basic provisions to millions of Palestinians. Suspension or redirection of basic aid will cause disruption and extra hardship in the lives of many Palestinians at this most critical time. The Committee appeals to the international donor community to ensure that the humanitarian plight of the Palestinian people does not worsen and to do all they can so that much-needed aid continues to reach those who need it the most.

The illegal Israeli policies of expanding and annexing settlements and the ongoing construction of the separation wall continue in violation of international law. These policies deprive the Palestinians of their just aspiration for a contiguous independent State of Palestine. The international community has continued to call on Israel to put an end to its policies that unlawfully seize Palestinian land and create faits accomplis on the ground. The Committee calls on the Security Council and the States parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to undertake urgent measures to pressure Israel to end this confiscation of land and renounce this policy.

For its part, the Committee will continue to work together with the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people — first and foremost with the President of the Palestinian Authority — who support the principles of non-violence, recognize the State of Israel and respect and adhere to previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements. The Committee is also in favour of a negotiated settlement of the conflict resulting in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours.

Such a settlement would make it possible to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to end the occupation, which began in 1967, on the basis of the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), agreements previously reached by the parties, the Arab Peace Initiative and acceptance of Israel as a neighbour in peace and security and in the context of a comprehensive settlement. Only such a comprehensive settlement will allow the Palestinian people to achieve their inalienable rights, which we all ardently desire.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The next speaker inscribed on my list is Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, on whom I now call.

Mr. Mahmassani (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to extend my congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We are confident that your skills and distinguished diplomatic experience will lead to Council to success. I would likewise like to thank Ambassador César Mayoral, Permanent Representative of Argentina, for his successful efforts during his presidency last month.

The Security Council is meeting today to discuss the Israeli policy of escalating military operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, with their attendant effects in lost lives and property. At the same time, Israeli occupying

authorities are expanding their illegal policy of settlements on occupied Palestinian territory. They are also continuing to erect the separation barrier, in flagrant violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Israel's persistence in adopting a policy of military solution will only lead to more deterioration of the situation in the region. Israel has escalated its military operations against the Palestinian people in the wake of free democratic elections by the Palestinian people, which led to the establishment of a Palestinian Government. Israel has also adopted financial measures to punish the Palestinian people for their democratic practices, and has prevented the transfer of tax and customs revenues that belong to the Palestinian Government. It has imposed a siege against Palestinians as a way of tightening the noose against them through the use of military and economic means. That is in blatant contravention of the Geneva Conventions and international law.

The policy of extrajudicial targeted killings by the authorities of the Israeli occupation, in violation of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, has led to more tension between Palestinian civilians and the occupation authorities. That has in turn led to further exacerbation of the situation on the ground. We appeal to the Security Council to prevail upon Israel to renounce the policy of a military solution and to reject the economic and financial siege imposed against Palestinians in an effort to starve them and to impose a de facto unilateral situation, which will lead to more chaos.

The Palestinian Government faces a very difficult financial and economic situation. It is indeed a tragic situation. Halting assistance to the Palestinian people and Israel's blackmail of Palestinians by preventing the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority are negative measures that will lead to a humanitarian disaster and will have disastrous consequences that are in no one's interest.

Half a century of Israeli-Palestinian conflict has proven that the road to peace in the region cannot be travelled with violence and military action. In that regard, the League of Arab States rejects the targeting of civilians by any party. Violence against civilians anywhere is completely unacceptable, including the military actions by the Israeli occupying forces in the occupied territories that have resulted in the loss of scores of innocent lives. Ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and reaching a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region requires returning to serious negotiations among the parties concerned, in accordance with internationally binding resolutions and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the provisions of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative of the 2002 Beirut summit.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 7.20 p.m.